A MODERN CHRONICLE

WINSTON CHURCHILL

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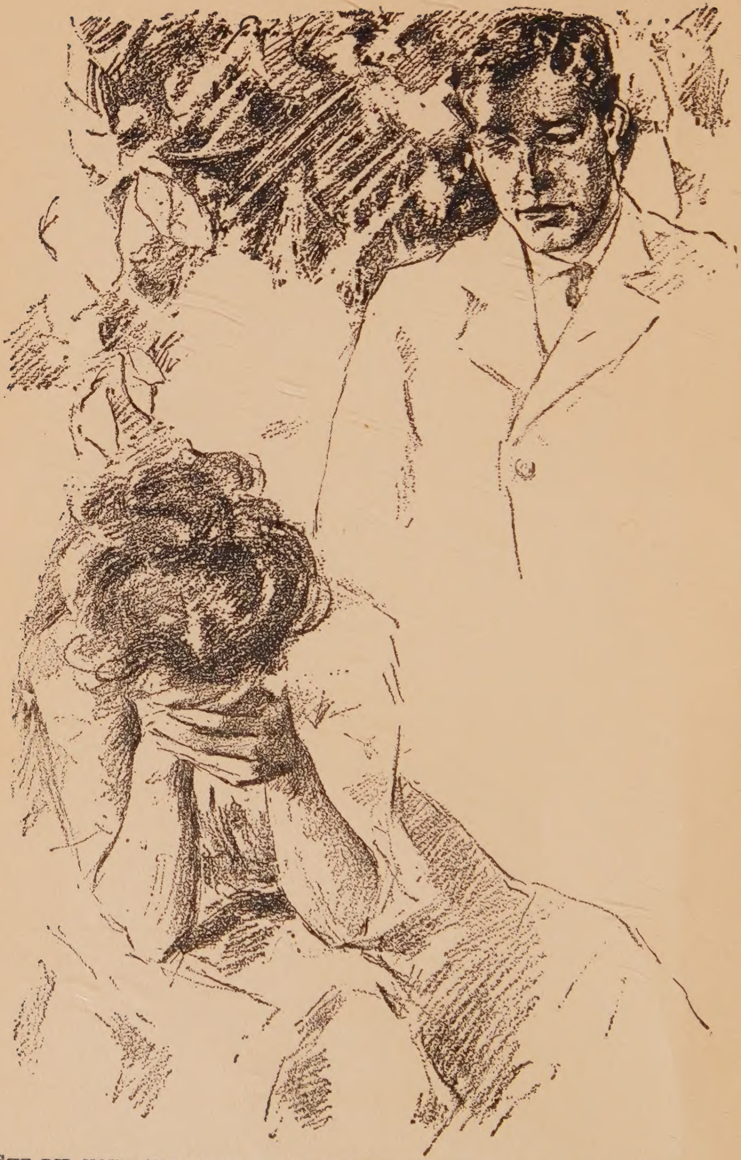

SHE DID NOT DARE LOOK AT THE SUFFERING IN HIS FACE (See page 146)

A MODERN CHRONICLE

BY

WINSTON CHURCHILL

AUTHOR OF "RICHARD CARVEL," "THE CRISIS,"
"MR. CREWE'S CAREER," ETC.

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J. H. GARDNER SOPER

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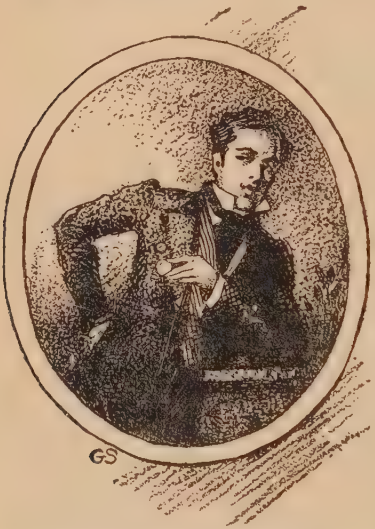
CHAPTER I

WHAT'S IN HEREDITY?

Honora Leffingwell is the original name of our heroine. She was born in the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century, at Nice, in France, and she spent the early years of her life in St. Louis, a somewhat conservative old city on the banks of the Mississippi River. Her father was Randolph Leffingwell, and he died in the early flower of his manhood, while filling with a grace that many remember the post of United States Consul at Nice. As a linguist he was a phenomenon, and his photograph in the tortoise-shell frame proves indubitably, to anyone acquainted with the fashions of 1870, that he was a master of that subtlest of all arts, dress. He had gentle blood in his veins, which came from Virginia through Kentucky in a coach and six, and he was the equal in appearance and manners of any duke who lingered beside classic seas.

Honora has often pictured to herself a gay villa set high above the curving shore, the amethyst depths shading into emerald, laced with milk-white foam, the vivid colours of the town, the gay costumes; the excursions, the dinner-parties presided over by the immaculate young consul in three languages, and the guests chosen from the haute noblesse of Europe. Such was the vision in her youthful mind, added to by degrees as she grew into young-ladyhood and surreptitiously became familiar with the writings of Ouida and the Duchess, and other literature of an educating cosmopolitan nature.

Honora's biography should undoubtedly contain a sketch of Mrs. Randolph Leffingwell. Beauty and dash and a knowledge of how to seat a table seem to have been the lady's chief characteristics; the only daughter of a carefully dressed and carefully preserved widower, — likewise a linguist, — whose super-refined tastes and the limited straits to which he, the remaining scion of an old Southern family, had been reduced by a gentlemanly contempt for money, led him to choose Paris rather than New York as a place of residence. One of the occasional and carefully planned trips to the Riviera proved fatal to the beautiful but reckless Myrtle Allison. She, who might have chosen counts or dukes from the Tagus to the Danube, or even crossed the Channel, took the dashing but impecunious American consul, with a faith in his future that was sublime. Without going over too carefully the upward path which led to the post of their country's representative at the court of St. James, neither had the slightest doubt that Randolph Leffingwell would tread it.



It is needless to dwell upon the chagrin of Honora's maternal grandfather, Howard Allison, Esquire, over this turn of affairs, this unexpected bouleversement, as he spoke of it in private to his friends in his Parisian club. For many years he had watched the personal attractions of his daughter grow, and a brougham and certain other delights not to be mentioned had gradually become, in his mind, synonymous with old age. The brougham would have on its panels the Allison crest, and his distinguished (and titled) son-in-law would drop in occasionally at the little apartment on the Boulevard Haussmann. Alas, for visions, for legitimate hopes shattered forever! On the day that Randolph Leffingwell led Miss Allison down the aisle of the English church the vision of the brougham and the other delights faded. Howard Allison went back to his club.

Three years later, while on an excursion with Sir Nicholas Baker and a merry party on the Italian side, the horses behind which Mr. and Mrs. Leffingwell were driving with their host ran away, and in the flight managed to precipitate the vehicle, and themselves, down the side of one of the numerous deep valleys of the streams seeking the Mediterranean. Thus, by a singular caprice of destiny Honora was deprived of both her parents at a period which — some chose to believe — was the height of their combined glories. Randolph Leffingwell lived long enough to be taken back to Nice, and to consign his infant daughter and sundry other unsolved problems to his brother Tom.

Brother Tom — or Uncle Tom, as we must call him with Honora — cheerfully accepted the charge. For his legacies in life had been chiefly blessings in disguise. He was paying teller of the Prairie Bank, and the thermometer registered something above 90° Fahrenheit on the July morning when he stood behind his wicket reading a letter from Howard Allison, Esquire, relative to his niece. Mr. Leffingwell was at this period of his life forty-eight, but the habit he had acquired of assuming responsibilities and burdens seemed to have had the effect of making his age indefinite. He was six feet tall, broad-shouldered, his mustache and hair already turning; his eyebrows were a trifle bushy, and his eyes reminded men of one eternal and highly prized quality — honesty. They were blue grey. Ordinarily they shed a light which sent people away from his window the happier without knowing why; but they had been known, on rare occasions, to flash on dishonesty and fraud like the lightnings of the Lord. Mr. Isham, the president of the bank, coined a phrase about him. He said that Thomas Leffingwell was constitutionally honest.

Although he had not risen above the position of paying teller, Thomas Leffingwell had a unique place in the city of his birth ; and the esteem in which he was held by capitalists and clerks proves that character counts for something. On his father's failure and death he had entered the Prairie Bank, at eighteen, and never left it. If he had owned it, he could not have been treated by the customers with more respect. The city, save for a few notable exceptions, like Mr. Isham, called him Mr. Leffingwell, but behind his back often spoke of him as Tom.

On the particular hot morning in question, as he stood in his seersucker coat reading the unquestionably pompous letter of Mr. Allison announcing that his niece was on the high seas, he returned the greetings of his friends with his usual kindness and cheer. In an adjoining compartment a long-legged boy of fourteen was busily stamping letters.

"Peter," said Mr. Leffingwell, "go ask Mr. Isham if I may see him."

It is advisable to remember the boy's name. It was Peter Erwin, and he was a favourite in the bank, where he had been introduced by Mr. Leffingwell himself. He was an orphan and lived with his grandmother, an impoverished old lady with good blood in her veins who boarded in Graham's Row, on Olive Street. Suffice it to add, at this time, that he worshipped Mr. Leffingwell, and that he was back in a twinkling with the information that Mr. Isham was awaiting him.

The president was seated at his desk. In spite of the thermometer he gave no appearance of discomfort in his frock-coat. He had scant, sandy-grey whiskers, a tightly closed and smooth-shaven upper lip, a nose with a decided ridge, and rather small but penetrating eyes in which the blue pigment had been used sparingly. His habitual mode of speech was both brief and sharp, but people remarked that he modified it a little for Tom Leffingwell.

"Come in, Tom," he said. "Anything the matter?"

"Mr. Isham, I want a week off, to go to New York."

The request, from Tom Leffingwell, took Mr. Isham's breath. One of the bank president's characteristics was an extreme interest in the private affairs of those who came within his zone of influence — and especially when these affairs evinced any irregularity.

"Randolph again?" he asked quickly.

Tom walked to the window, and stood looking out into the street. His voice shook as he answered: —

"Ten days ago I learned that my brother was dead, Mr. Isham."

The president glanced at the broad back of his teller. Mr. Isham's voice was firm, his face certainly betrayed no feeling, but a flitting gleam of satisfaction might have been seen in his eye.

"Of course, Tom, you may go," he answered.

Thus came to pass an event in the lives of Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary, that journey to New York (their first) of two nights and two days to fetch Honora. We need not dwell upon all that befell them. The first view of the Hudson, the first whiff of the salt air on this unwonted holiday, the sights of this crowded city of wealth, — all were tempered by the thought of the child coming into their lives. They were standing on the pier when the windows were crimson in the early light, and at nine o'clock on that summer's morning the *Albania* was docked, and the passengers came crowding down the gang-plank. Prosperous tourists, most of them, with servants and stewards carrying bags of English design and checked steamer rugs; and at last a ruddy-faced bonne with streamers and a bundle of ribbons and laces — Honora — Honora, aged eighteen months, gazing at a subjugated world.

"What a beautiful child!" exclaimed a woman on the pier.

Was it instinct or premonition that led them to accost the bonne?

"Oui, Laffingwell!" she cried, gazing at them in some perplexity. Three children of various sizes clung to her skirts, and a younger nurse carried a golden-haired little girl of Honora's age. A lady and gentleman followed. The lady was beginning to look matronly, and no second glance was required to perceive that she was a person of opinion and character. Mr. Holt was smaller than his wife, neat in dress and unobtrusive in appearance. In the rich Mrs. Holt, the friend of the Randolph Leffingwells, Aunt Mary was prepared to find a more vapidly fashionable personage, and had schooled herself forthwith.

"You are Mrs. Thomas Leffingwell?" she asked. "Well, I *am* relieved." The lady's eyes, travelling rapidly over Aunt Mary's sober bonnet and brooch and gown, made it appear that these features in Honora's future guardian gave her the relief in question. "Honora, this is your aunt."

Honora smiled from amidst the laces, and Aunt Mary, only too ready to capitulate, surrendered. She held out her arms. Tears welled up in the Frenchwoman's eyes as she abandoned her charge.

"Pauvre mignonne!" she cried.

But Mrs. Holt rebuked the nurse sharply, in French, — a language with which neither Aunt Mary nor Uncle Tom was familiar. Fortunately, perhaps. Mrs. Holt's remark was to the effect that Honora was going to a sensible home.

"Hortense loves her better than my own children," said that lady.

Honora seemed quite content in the arms of Aunt Mary, who was gazing so earnestly into the child's face that she did not at first hear Mrs. Holt's invitation to take breakfast with them on Madison Avenue, and then she declined politely. While crossing on the steamer, Mrs. Holt had decided quite clearly in her mind just what she was going to say to the child's future guardian, but there was something in Aunt Mary's voice and manner which made these remarks seem unnecessary — although Mrs. Holt was secretly disappointed not to deliver them.

"It was fortunate that we happened to be in Nice at the time," she said with the evident feeling that some explanation was due. "I did not know poor Mrs. Randolph Leffingwell very — very intimately, or Mr. Leffingwell. It was such a sudden — such a terrible affair. But Mr. Holt and I were only too glad to do what we could."

"We feel very grateful to you," said Aunt Mary, quietly.

Mrs. Holt looked at her with a still more distinct approval, being tolerably sure that Mrs. Thomas Leffingwell understood. She had cleared her skirts of any possible implication of intimacy with the late Mrs. Randolph, and done so with a master touch.

In the meantime Honora had passed to Uncle Tom. After securing the little trunk, and settling certain matters with Mr. Holt, they said good-by to her late kind protectors, and started off for the nearest street-cars, Honora pulling Uncle Tom's mustache. More than one pedestrian paused to look back at the tall man carrying the beautiful child, bedecked like a young princess, and more than one passenger in the street cars smiled at them both.

CHAPTER II

PERDITA RECALLED

SAINT LOUIS, or that part of it which is called by dealers in real estate the choice residence section, grew westward. And Uncle Tom might be said to have been in the vanguard of the movement. In the days before Honora was born he had built his little house on what had been a farm on the Olive Street Road, at the crest of the second ridge from the river. Up this ridge, with clanking traces, toiled the horse-cars that carried Uncle Tom downtown to the bank and Aunt Mary to market.

Fleeing westward, likewise, from the smoke, friends of Uncle Tom's and Aunt Mary's gradually surrounded them — building, as a rule, the high Victorian mansions in favour at that period, which were placed in the centre of commodious yards. For the friends of Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary were for the most part rich, and belonged, as did they, to the older families of the city. Mr. Dwyer's house, with its picture gallery, was across the street.

In the midst of such imposing company the little dwelling which became the home of our heroine sat well back in a plot that might almost be called a garden. In summer its white wooden front was nearly hidden by the quivering leaves of two tall pear trees. On the other side of the brick walk, and near the iron fence, was an elm and a flower bed that was Uncle Tom's pride and the admiration of the neighbourhood. Honora has but to shut her eyes to see it aflame with tulips at Eastertide. The eastern wall of the house was a mass of Virginia creeper, and beneath that another flower bed, and still another in the back-yard behind the lattice fence covered with cucumber vine. There were, besides, two maples and two apricot trees, relics of the farm, and of blessed memory. Such apricots! Visions of hot summer evenings come back, with Uncle Tom, in his seersucker coat, with his green watering-pot, bending over the beds, and Aunt Mary seated upright in her chair, looking up from her knitting with a loving eye.

Behind the lattice, on these summer evenings, stands the militant figure of that old retainer, Bridget the cook, her stout arms akimbo, ready to engage in vigorous banter should Honora deign to approach.

"Whisht, 'Nora darlint, it's a young lady ye'll be soon, and the beaux a-comin' 'round!" she would cry, and throw back her head and laugh until the tears were in her eyes.

And the princess, a slim figure in an immaculate linen frock with red ribbons which Aunt Mary had copied from Longstreth's London catalogue, would reply with dignity:

"Bridget, I wish you would try to remember that my name is Honora."

Another spasm of laughter from Bridget.

"Listen to that now!" she would cry to another ancient retainer, Mary Ann, the housemaid, whose kitchen chair was tilted up against the side of the woodshed. "It'll be 'Miss Honora' next, and George Hanbury here to-day with his eye through a knothole in the fence, out of his head for a sight of ye."

George Hanbury was Honora's cousin, and she did not deem his admiration a subject fit for discussion with Bridget.

"Sure," declared Mary Ann, "it's the air of a princess the child has."

That she should be thought a princess did not appear at all remarkable to Honora at twelve years of age. Perdita may have had such dreams. She had been born, she knew, in some wondrous land by the shores of the summer seas, not at all like St. Louis, and friends and relatives had not hesitated to remark in her hearing that she resembled her father,—that handsome father who surely must have been a prince, whose before-mentional photograph in the tortoise-shell frame was on the bureau in her little room. So far as Randolph Leffingwell was concerned, photography had not been invented for nothing. Other records of him remained which Honora had likewise seen: one end of a rose-covered villa which Honora thought was a wing of his palace ; a coach and four he was driving, and which had chanced to belong to an Englishman, although the photograph gave no evidence of this ownership. Neither Aunt Mary nor Uncle Tom had ever sought — for reasons perhaps obvious — to correct the child's impression of an extraordinary paternity.

Aunt Mary was a Puritan of Southern ancestry, and her father had been a Presbyterian minister. Uncle Tom was a member of the vestry of a church still under Puritan influences. As a consequence for Honora, there were Sunday afternoons — periods when the imaginative faculty, in which she was by no means lacking, was given full play. She would sit by the hour in the swing Uncle Tom had hung for her under the maple near the lattice, while castles rose on distant heights against blue skies. There was her real home, in a balconied chamber that overlooked mile upon mile of rustling forest in the valley; and when the wind blew, the sound of it was like the sea. Honora did not remember the sea, but its music was often in her ears.

She would be aroused from these dreams of greatness by the appearance of old Catherine, her nurse, on the side porch, reminding her that it was time to wash for supper. No princess could have had a more humble tiring-woman than Catherine.

Honora cannot be unduly blamed. When she reached the "little house under the hill" (as Catherine called the chamber beneath the eaves), she beheld reflected in the mirror an image like a tall, white flower that might indeed have belonged to a princess. Her hair, the colour of burnt sienna, fell evenly to her shoulders ; her features even then had regularity and hauteur ; her legs, in their black silk stockings, were straight; and the simple white lawn frock made the best of a slender figure. Those frocks of Honora's were a continual source of wonder —

and sometimes of envy — to Aunt Mary's friends; who returned from the seaside in the autumn, after a week among the fashions in Boston or New York, to find Honora in the latest models, and better dressed than their own children. Aunt Mary made no secret of the methods by which these seeming miracles were performed, and showed Cousin Eleanor Hanbury the fashion plates in the English periodicals. Cousin Eleanor sighed.

"Mary, you are wonderful," she would say. "Honora's clothes are better-looking than those I buy in the East, at such fabulous prices, from Cavendish."

Indeed, no woman was ever farther removed from personal vanity than Aunt Mary. She looked like a little Quakeress. Her silvered hair was parted in the middle and had, in spite of palpable efforts towards tightness and repression, a perceptible ripple in it. Grey was her only concession to colour, and her gowns and bonnets were of a primness which belonged to the past. Repression, or perhaps compression, was her note, for the energy confined within her little body was a thing to have astounded scientists. And Honora grew to womanhood and reflection before she had guessed or considered that her aunt was possessed of intense emotions which had no outlet. Her features were regular, her shy eye had the clearness of a forest pool. She believed in predestination, which is to say that she was a fatalist; and while she steadfastly continued to regard this world as a place of sorrow and trials, she concerned herself very little about her participation in a future life. Old Dr. Ewing, the rector of St. Anne's, while conceding that no better or more charitable woman existed, found it so exceedingly difficult to talk to her on the subject of religion that he had never tried it but once.

Such was Aunt Mary. The true student of human nature should not find it surprising that she spoiled Honora and strove — at what secret expense, care, and self-denial to Uncle Tom and herself, none will ever know — to adorn the child that she might appear creditably among companions whose parents were more fortunate in this world's goods; that she denied herself to educate Honora as these other children were educated. Nor is it astonishing that she should not have understood the highly complex organism of the young lady we have chosen for our heroine, who was shaken, at the age of thirteen, by unfulfilled longings.

Very early in life Honora learned to dread the summer, when one by one the families of her friends departed until the city itself seemed a remote and distant place from what it had been in the spring and winter. The great houses were closed and blinded, and in the evening the servants who had been left behind chattered on the front steps. Honora could not bear the sound of the trains that drifted across the night, and the sight of the trunks piled in the Hanburys' hall, in Wayland Square, always filled her with a sickening longing. Would the day ever come when she, too, would depart for the bright places of the earth? Sometimes, when she looked in the mirror, she was filled with a fierce belief in a destiny to sit in the high seats, to receive homage and dispense bounties, to discourse with great intellects, to know London and Paris and the marts and centres of the world as her father had. To escape — only to escape from the prison walls of a humdrum existence, and to soar!

Let us, if we can, reconstruct an August day when all (or nearly all) of Honora's small friends were gone eastward to the mountains or the seaside. In "the little house under the hill," the surface of which was a hot slate roof, Honora would awake about seven o'clock to find old Catherine bending over her in a dun-coloured calico dress, with the light fiercely beating against the closed shutters that braved it so unflinchingly throughout the day.

"The birrds are before ye, Miss Honora, honey, and your uncle waterin' his roses this half-hour."

Uncle Tom was indeed an early riser. As Honora dressed (Catherine assisting as at a ceremony), she could see him, in his seersucker coat, bending tenderly over his beds; he lived enveloped in a peace which has since struck wonder to Honora's soul. She lingered in her dressing, even in those days, falling into reveries from which Catherine gently and deferentially aroused her; and Uncle Tom would be carving the beefsteak and Aunt Mary pouring the coffee when she finally arrived in the dining room to nibble at one of Bridget's unforgettable rolls or hot biscuits. Uncle Tom had his joke, and at quarter-past eight precisely he would kiss Aunt Mary and walk to the corner to wait for the ambling horse-car that was to take him to the bank. Sometimes Honora went to the corner with him, and he waved her good-by from the platform as he felt in his pocket for the nickel that was to pay his fare.

When Honora returned, Aunt Mary had donned her apron, and was industriously aiding Mary Ann to wash the dishes and maintain the customary high polish on her husband's share of the Leffingwell silver which, standing on the side table, shot hither and thither rays of green light that filtered through the shutters into the darkened room. The child partook of Aunt Mary's pride in that silver, made for a Kentucky great-grandfather Leffingwell by a famous Philadelphia silversmith three-quarters of a century before. Honora sighed.

"What's the matter, Honora?" asked Aunt Mary, without pausing in her vigorous rubbing.

"The Leffingwells used to be great once upon a time, didn't they, Aunt Mary?"

"Your Uncle Tom," answered Aunt Mary, quietly, "is the greatest man I know, child."

"And my father must have been a great man, too," cried Honora, "to have been a consul and drive coaches."

Aunt Mary was silent. She was not a person who spoke easily on difficult subjects.

"Why don't you ever talk to me about my father, Aunt Mary? Uncle Tom does."

"I didn't know your father, Honora."

"But you have seen him?"

"Yes," said Aunt Mary, dipping her cloth into the whiting; "I saw him at my wedding. But he was very young."

"What was he like?" Honora demanded. "He was very handsome, wasn't he?"

"Yes, child."

"And he had ambition, didn't he, Aunt Mary?"

Aunt Mary paused. Her eyes were troubled as she looked at Honora, whose head was thrown back.

"What kind of ambition do you mean, Honora?"

"Oh," cried Honora, "to be great and rich and powerful, and to be somebody."

"Who has been putting such things in your head, my dear?"

"No one, Aunt Mary. Only, if I were a man, I shouldn't rest until I became great."

Alas, that Aunt Mary, with all her will, should have such limited powers of expression! She resumed her scrubbing of the silver before she spoke.

"To do one's duty, to accept cheerfully and like a Christian the responsibilities and burdens of life, is the highest form of greatness, my child. Your Uncle Tom has had many things to trouble him; he has always worked for others, and not for himself. And he is respected and loved by all who know him."

"Yes, I know, Aunt Mary. But —"

"But what, Honora?"

"Then why isn't he rich, as my father was?"

"Your father wasn't rich, my dear," said Aunt Mary, sadly.

"Why, Aunt Mary!" Honora exclaimed, "he lived in a beautiful house, and owned horses. Isn't that being rich?"

Poor Aunt Mary!

"Honora," she answered, "there are some things you are too young to understand. But try to remember, my dear, that happiness doesn't consist in being rich."

"But I have often heard you say that you wished you were rich, Aunt Mary, and had nice things, and a picture gallery like Mr. Dwyer."

"I should like to have beautiful pictures, Honora."

"I don't like Mr. Dwyer," declared Honora, abruptly.

"You mustn't say that, Honora," was Aunt Mary's reproof. "Mr. Dwyer is an upright, public-spirited man, and he thinks a great deal of your Uncle Tom."

"I can't help it, Aunt Mary," said Honora. "I think he enjoys being — well, being able to do things for a man like Uncle Tom."

Neither Aunt Mary nor Honora guessed what a subtle criticism this was of Mr. Dwyer. Aunt Mary was troubled and puzzled; and she began to speculate (not for the first time) why the Lord had given a person with so little imagination a child like Honora to bring up in the straight and narrow path.

"When I go on Sunday afternoons with Uncle Tom to see Mr. Dwyer's pictures," Honora persisted, "I always feel that he is so glad to have what other people haven't, or he wouldn't have any one to show them to."

Aunt Mary shook her head. Once she had given her loyal friendship, such faults as this became as nothing.

"And then," said Honora, "when Mrs. Dwyer has dinner-parties for celebrated people who come here, why does she invite you in to see the table?"

"Out of kindness, Honora. Mrs. Dwyer knows that I enjoy looking at beautiful things."

"Why doesn't she invite you to the dinners?" asked Honora, hotly. "Our family is just as good as Mrs. Dwyer's."

The extent of Aunt Mary's distress was not apparent.

"You are talking nonsense, my child," she said. "All my friends know that I am not a person who can entertain distinguished people, and that I do not go out, and that I haven't the money to buy evening dresses. And even if I had," she added, "I haven't a pretty neck, so it's just as well."

A philosophy distinctly Aunt Mary's.

Uncle Tom, after he had listened without comment that evening to her account of this conversation, was of the opinion that to take Honora to task for her fancies would be waste of breath; that they would right themselves as she grew up.

"I'm afraid it's inheritance, Tom," said Aunt Mary, at last. "And if so, it ought to be counteracted. We've seen other signs of it. You know Honora has little or no idea of the value of money — or of its ownership."

"She sees little enough of it," Uncle Tom remarked with a smile.

"Tom."

"Well."

"Sometimes I think I've done wrong not to dress her more simply. I'm afraid it's given the child a taste for — for self-adornment."

"I once had a fond belief that all women possessed such a taste," said Uncle Tom, with a quizzical look at his own exception. "To tell you the truth, I never classed it as a fault."

"Then I don't see why you married me," said Aunt Mary — a periodical remark of hers. "But, Tom, I do wish her to appear as well as the other children, and (Aunt Mary actually blushed) the child has good looks."

"Why don't you go as far as old Catherine, and call her a princess?" he asked.

"Do you want me to ruin her utterly?" exclaimed Aunt Mary.

Uncle Tom put his hands on his wife's shoulders and looked down into her face, and smiled again. Although she held herself very straight, the top of her head was very little above the level of his chin.

"It strikes me that you are entitled to some little indulgence in life, Mary," he said.

One of the curious contradictions of Aunt Mary's character was a never dying interest, which held no taint of envy, in the doings of people more fortunate than herself. In the long summer days, after her silver was cleaned and her housekeeping and marketing finished, she read in the book-club periodicals of royal marriages, embassy balls, of great town and country houses and their owners at home and abroad. And she knew, by means of a correspondence with Cousin Eleanor Hanbury and other intimates, the kind of cottages in which her friends sojourned at the seashore or in the mountains; how many rooms they had, and how many servants, and very often who the servants were; she was likewise informed on the climate, and the ease with which it was possible to obtain fresh vegetables. And to all of this information Uncle Tom would listen, smiling but genuinely interested, while he carved at dinner.

One evening, when Uncle Tom had gone to play piquet with Mr. Isham, who was ill, Honora further surprised her aunt by exclaiming: —

"How can you talk of things other people have and not want them, Aunt Mary?"

"Why should I desire what I cannot have, my dear? I take such pleasure out of my friends' possessions as I can."

"But you want to go to the seashore, I know you do. I've heard you say so," Honora protested.

"I should like to see the open ocean before I die," admitted Aunt Mary, unexpectedly. "I saw New York harbour once, when we went to meet you. And I know how the salt water smells — which is as much, perhaps, as I have the right to hope for. But I have often thought it would be nice to sit for a whole summer by the sea and listen to the waves dashing upon the beach, like those in the Chase picture in Mr. Dwyer's gallery."

Aunt Mary little guessed the unspeakable rebellion aroused in Honora by this acknowledgment of being fatally circumscribed. Wouldn't Uncle Tom ever be rich?

Aunt Mary shook her head — she saw no prospect of it.

But other men, who were not half so good as Uncle Tom, got rich.

Uncle Tom was not the kind of man who cared for riches. He was content to do his duty in that sphere where God had placed him.

Poor Aunt Mary. Honora never asked her uncle such questions: to do so never occurred to her. At peace with all men, he gave of his best to children, and Honora remained a child. Next to his flowers, walking was

Uncle Tom's chief recreation, and from the time she could be guided by the hand she went with him. His very presence had the gift of dispelling longings, even in the young; the gift of compelling delight in simple things. Of a Sunday afternoon, if the heat were not too great, he would take Honora to the wild park that stretches westward of the city, and something of the depth and intensity of his pleasure in the birds, the forest, and the wild flowers would communicate itself to her. She learned all unconsciously (by suggestion, as it were) to take delight in them; a delight that was to last her lifetime, a never failing resource to which she was to turn again and again. In winter, they went to the botanical gardens or the Zoo. Uncle Tom had a passion for animals, and Mr. Isham, who was a director, gave him a pass through the gates. The keepers knew him, and spoke to him with kindly respect. Nay, it seemed to Honora that the very animals knew him, and offered themselves ingratiatingly to be stroked by one whom they recognized as friend. Jaded horses in the street lifted their noses; stray, homeless cats rubbed against his legs, and vagrant dogs looked up at him trustfully with wagging tails.

Yet his goodness, as Emerson would have said, had some edge to it. Honora had seen the light of anger in his blue eye — a divine ray. Once he had chastised her for telling Aunt Mary a lie (she could not have lied to him) and Honora had never forgotten it. The anger of such a man had indeed some element in it of the divine; terrible, not in volume, but in righteous intensity. And when it had passed there was no occasion for future warning. The memory of it lingered.

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING PROVIDENCE

WHAT quality was it in Honora that compelled Bridget to stop her ironing on Tuesdays in order to make hot waffles for a young woman who was late to breakfast? Bridget, who would have filled the kitchen with righteous wrath if Aunt Mary had transgressed the rules of the house, which were like the laws of the Medes and Persians! And in Honora's early youth Mary Ann, the housemaid, spent more than one painful evening writing home for cockle shells and other articles to propitiate our princess, who rewarded her with a winning smile and a kiss, which invariably melted the honest girl into tears. The Queen of Scots never had a more devoted chamber woman than old Catherine, who would have gone to the stake with a smile to save her little lady a single childish ill, and who spent her savings, until severely taken to task by Aunt Mary, upon objects for which a casual wish had been expressed. The saints themselves must at times have been aweary from hearing Honora's name.

Not to speak of Christmas! Christmas in the little house was one wild delirium of joy. The night before the festival was, to all outward appearances, an ordinary evening, when Uncle Tom sat by the fire in his slippers, as usual, scouting the idea that there would be any Christmas at all. Aunt Mary sewed, and talked with maddening calmness of the news of the day; but for Honora the air was charged with coming events of the first magnitude. The very furniture of the little sitting-room had a different air, the room itself wore a mysterious aspect, and the cannel-coal fire seemed to give forth a special quality of unearthly light.

"Is to-morrow Christmas?" Uncle Tom would exclaim. "Bless me! Honora, I am so glad you reminded me."

"Now, Uncle Tom, you knew it was Christmas all the time!"

"Kiss your uncle good night, Honora, and go right to sleep, dear,"—from Aunt Mary.

The unconscious irony in that command of Aunt Mary's!—to go right to sleep! Many times was a head lifted from a small pillow, straining after the meaning of the squeaky noises that came up from below! Not Santa Claus. Honora's belief in him had merged into a blind faith in a larger and even more benevolent (if material) providence: the kind of providence which Mr. Meredith depicts, and which was to say to Beauchamp "Here's your marquise;" a particular providence which, at the proper time, gave Uncle Tom money, and commanded, with a smile, "Buy this for Honora—she wants it." All-sufficient reason! Soul-satisfying philosophy, to which Honora was to cling for many years of life. It is amazing how much can be wrung from a reluctant world by the mere belief in this kind of providence.

Sleep came at last, in the darkest of the hours. And still in the dark hours a stirring, a delicious sensation preceding reason, and the consciousness of a figure stealing about the room. Honora sat up in bed, shivering with cold and delight.

"Is it awake ye are, darlint, and it but four o'clock the morn!"

"What are you doing, Cathy?"

"Musha, it's to Mass I'm going, to ask the Mother of God to give ye many happy Christmases the like of this, Miss Honora." And Catherine's arms were about her.

"Oh, it's Christmas, Cathy, isn't it? How could I have forgotten it!"

"Now go to sleep, honey. Your aunt and uncle wouldn't like it at all at all if ye was to make noise in the middle of the night—and it's little better it is."

Sleep! A despised waste of time in childhood. Catherine went to Mass, and after an eternity, the grey

December light began to sift through the shutters, and human endurance had reached its limit. Honora, still shivering, seized a fleecy wrapper (the handiwork of Aunt Mary) and crept, a diminutive ghost, down the creaking stairway to the sitting-room. A sitting-room which now was not a sitting-room, but for to-day a place of magic. As though by a prearranged salute of the gods, at Honora's entrance the fire burst through the thick blanket of fine coal which Uncle Tom had laid before going to bed, and with a little gasp of joy that was almost pain, she paused on the threshold. That one flash, like Pizarro's first sunrise over Peru, gilded the edge of infinite possibilities.

Needless to enumerate them. The whole world, as we know, was in a conspiracy to spoil Honora. The Dwyers, the Cartwrights, the Haydens, the Brices, the Ishams, and I know not how many others had sent their tributes, and Honora's second cousins, the Hanburys, from the family mansion behind the stately elms of Wayland Square — of which something anon. A miniature mahogany desk, a prayer-book and hymnal which the Dwyers had brought home from New York, endless volumes of a more secular and (to Honora) entrancing nature; roller skates; skates for real ice, when it should apppear in the form of sleet on the sidewalks; a sled; humbler gifts from Bridget, Mary Ann, and Catherine, and a wonderful coat, with hat to match, of a certain dark green velvet. When Aunt Mary appeared, an hour or so later, Honora was surveying her magnificence in the glass.

"Oh, Aunt Mary!" she cried, with her arms tightly locked around her aunt's neck, "how lovely! Did you send all the way to New York for it?"

"No, Honora," said her aunt, "it didn't come from New York." Aunt Mary did not explain that this coat had been her one engrossing occupation for six weeks, at such times when Honora was out or tucked away safely in bed.

Perhaps Honora's face fell a little. Aunt Mary scanned it rather anxiously.

"Does that cause you to like it any less, Honora?" she asked.

"Aunt Mary!" exclaimed Honora, in a tone of reproval. And added after a little, "I suppose Mademoiselle made it."

"Does it make any difference who made it, Honora?"

"Oh, no indeed, Aunt Mary. May I wear it to Cousin Eleanor's to-day?"

"I gave it to you to wear, Honora."

Not in Honora's memory was there a Christmas breakfast during which Peter Erwin did not appear, bringing gifts. Peter Erwin, of whom we caught a glimpse doing an errand for Uncle Tom in the bank. With the complacency of the sun Honora was wont to regard this most constant of her satellites. Her awakening powers of observation had discovered him in bondage, and in bondage he had been ever since: for their acquaintance had begun on the first Sunday afternoon after Honora's arrival in St. Louis at the age of eighteen months. It will be remembered that Honora was even then a coquette, and as she sat in her new baby-carriage under the pear tree, flirted outrageously with Peter, who stood on one foot from embarrassment.

"Why, Peter," Uncle Tom had said slyly, "why don't you kiss her?"

That kiss had been Peter's seal of service. And he became, on Sunday afternoons, a sort of understudy for Catherine. He took an amazing delight in wheeling Honora up and down the yard, and up and down the sidewalk. Brunhilde or Queen Elizabeth never wielded a power more absolute, nor had an adorer more satisfactory; and of all his remarkable talents, none were more conspicuous than his abilities to tell a story and to choose a present. Emancipated from the perambulator, Honora would watch for him at the window, and toddle to the gate to meet him, a gentleman-in-waiting whose zeal, however arduous, never flagged.

On this particular Christmas morning, when she heard the gate slam, Honora sprang up from the table to don her green velvet coat. Poor Peter! As though his subjugation could be more complete!

"It's the postman," suggested Uncle Tom, wickedly.

"It's Peter!" cried Honora, triumphantly, from the hall as she flung open the door, letting in a breath of cold Christmas air out of the sunlight.

It was Peter, but a Peter who has changed some since perambulator days,—just as Honora has changed some. A Peter who, instead of fourteen, is six and twenty; a full-fledged lawyer, in the office of that most celebrated of St. Louis practitioners, Judge Stephen Brice. For the Peter Erwins of this world are queer creatures, and move rapidly without appearing to the Honoras to move at all. A great many things have happened to Peter since he had been a messenger boy in the bank.

Needless to say, Uncle Tom had taken an interest in him. And, according to Peter, this fact accounted for all the good fortune which had followed. Shortly before the news came of his brother's death, Uncle Tom had discovered that the boy who did his errands so willingly was going to night school, and was the grandson of a gentleman who had fought with credit in the Mexican War, and died in misfortune: the grandmother was Peter's only living relative. Through Uncle Tom, Mr. Isham became interested, and Judge Brice. There was a certain scholarship in the Washington University which Peter obtained, and he worked his way through the law school afterwards.

A simple story, of which many a duplicate could be found in this country of ours. In the course of the dozen years or so of its unravelling the grandmother had died, and Peter had become, to all intents and purposes, a member of Uncle Tom's family. A place was set for him at Sunday dinner; and, if he did not appear, at Sunday tea. Sometimes at both. And here he was, as usual, on Christmas morning, his arms so full that he had had to push open the gate with his foot.

"Well, well, well, well!" he said, stopping short on the doorstep and surveying our velvet-clad princess, "I've come to the wrong house."

The princess stuck her finger into her cheek.

"Don't be silly, Peter!" she said; "and Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas!" he replied, edging sidewise in at the door and depositing his parcels on the mahogany horsehair sofa. He chose one, and seized the princess — velvet coat and all! — in his arms and kissed her. When he released her, there remained in her hand a morocco-bound diary, marked with her monogram, and destined to contain high matters.

"How could you know what I wanted, Peter?" she exclaimed, after she had divested it of the tissue paper, holly, and red ribbon in which he had so carefully wrapped it. For it is a royal trait to thank with the same graciousness and warmth the donors of the humblest and the greatest offerings.

There was a paper-knife for Uncle Tom, and a workbasket for Aunt Mary, and a dress apiece for Catherine, Bridget, and Mary Ann, none of whom Peter ever forgot. Although the smoke was even at that period beginning to creep westward, the sun poured through the lace curtains into the little dining-room and danced on the silver coffeepot as Aunt Mary poured out Peter's cup, and the blue china breakfast plates were bluer than ever because it was Christmas. The humblest of familiar articles took on the air of a present. And after breakfast, while Aunt Mary occupied herself with that immemorial institution, — which was to lure hitherwards so many prominent citizens of St. Louis during the day, — eggnogg, Peter surveyed the offerings which transformed the sitting-room. The table had been pushed back against the bookcases, the chairs knew not their time-honoured places, and white paper and red ribbon littered the floor. Uncle Tom, relegated to a corner, pretended to read his newspaper, while Honora flitted from Peter's knees to his, or sat cross-legged on the hearthrug investigating a bottomless stocking.

"What in the world are we going to do with all these things?" said Peter.

"We?" cried Honora.

"When we get married, I mean," said Peter, smiling at Uncle Tom. "Let's see!" and he began counting on his fingers, which were long but very strong — so strong that Honora could never loosen even one of them when they gripped her. "One — two — three — eight Christmases before you are twenty-one. We'll have enough things to set us up in housekeeping. Or perhaps you'd rather get married when you are eighteen?"

"I've always told you I wasn't going to marry you, Peter," said Honora, with decision.

"Why not?" He always asked that question.

Honora sighed.

"I'll make a good husband," said Peter; "I'll promise. Ugly men are always good husbands."

"I didn't say you were ugly," declared the ever considerate Honora.

"Only my nose is too big," he quoted; "and I am too long one way and not wide enough."

"You have a certain air of distinction in spite of it," said Honora.

Uncle Tom's newspaper began to shake, and he read more industriously than ever.

"You've been reading — novels!" said Peter, in a terrible judicial voice.

Honora flushed guiltily, and resumed her inspection of the stocking. Miss Rossiter, a maiden lady of somewhat romantic tendencies, was librarian of the Book Club that year. And as a result a book called "Harold's Quest," by an author who shall be nameless, had come to the house. And it was Harold who had had "a certain air of distinction."

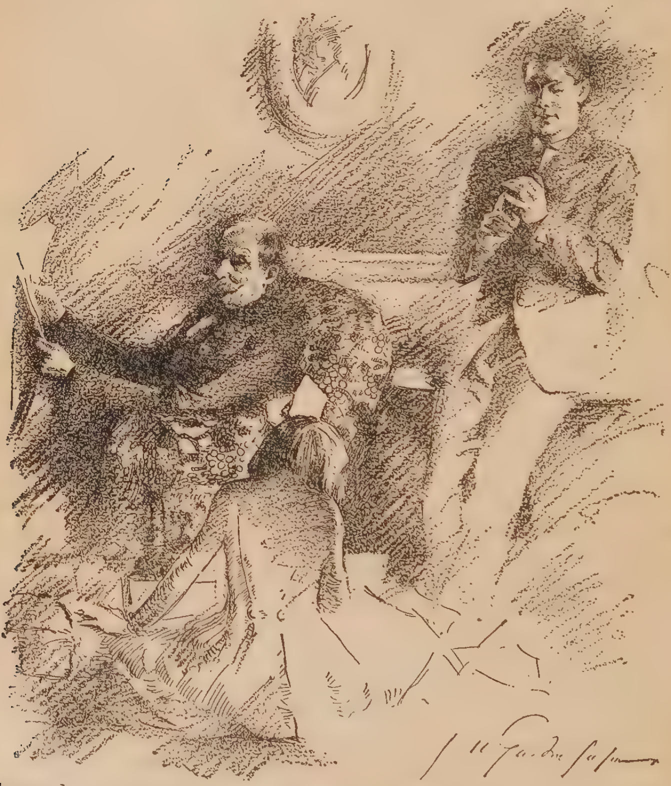
"It isn't very kind of you to make fun of me when I pay you a compliment," replied Honora, with dignity.

"I was naturally put out," he declared gravely, "because you said you wouldn't marry me. But I don't intend to give up. No man who is worth his salt ever gives up."

"You are old enough to get married now," said Honora, still considerate.

"But I am not rich enough," said Peter; "and besides, I want you."

One of the first entries in the morocco diary — which had a lock and key to it — was a description of Honora's future husband. We cannot violate the lock, nor steal the key from under her pillow. But this much, alas, may be said with discretion, that he bore no resemblance to Peter Erwin. It may be guessed, however, that he contained something of Harold, and more of Randolph Leffingwell; and that he did not live in St. Louis.



An event of Christmas, after church, was the dinner of which Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary and Honora partook with Cousin Eleanor Hanbury, who had been a Leffingwell, and was a first cousin of Honora's father. Honora loved the atmosphere of the massive, yellow stone house in Wayland Square, with its tall polished mahogany doors and thick carpets, with its deferential darky servants, some of whom had been the slaves of her great uncle. To Honora, gifted with imagination, the house had an odour all its own; a rich, clean odour significant, in later life, of wealth and luxury and spotless housekeeping. And she knew it from top to bottom. The spacious upper floor, which in ordinary dwellings would have been an attic, was the realm of young George and his sisters, Edith and Mary (Aunt Mary's namesake). Rainy Saturdays, all too brief, Honora had passed there, when the big dolls' house in the playroom became the scene of domestic dramas which Edith rehearsed after she went to bed, although Mary took them more calmly. In his tenderer years, Honora even fired George, and riots occurred which took the combined efforts of Cousin Eleanor and Mammy Lucy to quell. It may be remarked, in passing, that Cousin Eleanor looked with suspicion upon this imaginative gift of Honora's, and had several serious conversations with Aunt Mary on the subject.

It was true, in a measure, that Honora quickened to life everything she touched, and her arrival in Wayland Square was invariably greeted with shouts of joy. There was no doll on which she had not bestowed a history, and by dint of her insistence their pasts clung to them with all the reality of a fate not by any means to be lived down. If George rode the huge rocking-horse, he was Paul Revere, or some equally historic figure, and sometimes, to Edith's terror, he was compelled to assume the rôle of Bluebeard, when Honora submitted to decapitation with a fortitude amounting to stoicism. Hide and seek was altogether too tame for her, a stake of life and death, or imprisonment or treasure, being a necessity. And many times was Edith extracted from the recesses of the cellar in a condition bordering on hysterics, the day ending tamely with a Bible story or a selection from "Little Women" read by Cousin Eleanor.

In autumn, and again in spring and early summer before the annual departure of the Hanbury family for the sea, the pleasant yard with its wide shade trees and its shrubbery was a land of enchantment threatened by a genie. Black Bias, the family coachman, polishing the fat carriage horses in the stable yard, was the genie; and George the intrepid knight who, spurred by Honora, would dash in and pinch Bias in a part of his anatomy which the honest darky had never seen. An ideal genie, for he could assume an astonishing fierceness at will.

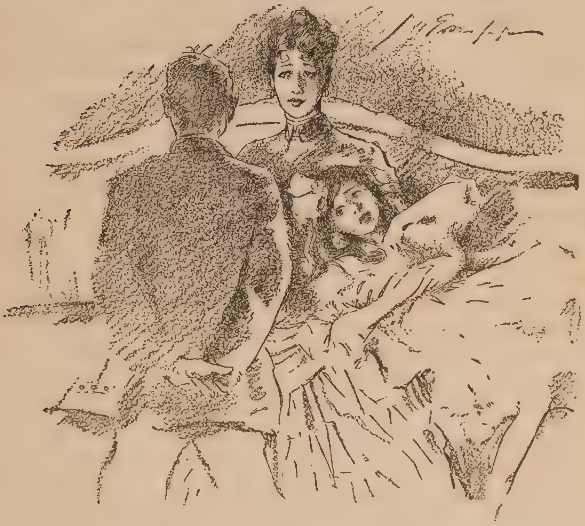
"I'll git you yit, Marse George!"

Had it not been for Honora, her cousins would have found the paradise in which they lived a commonplace spot, and indeed they never could realize its tremendous possibilities in her absence. What would the Mediterranean Sea and its adjoining countries be to us unless the wanderings of Ulysses and Æneas had made them real? And what would Cousin Eleanor's yard have been without Honora? Whatever there was of romance and folklore in Uncle Tom's library Honora had extracted at an early age, and with astonishing ease had avoided that which was dry and uninteresting. The result was a nomenclature for Aunt Eleanor's yard, in which there was even a *terra incognita* wherefrom venturesome travellers never returned, but were transformed into wild beasts or monkeys.

Although they acknowledged her leadership, Edith and Mary were sorry for Honora, for they knew that if her father had lived she would have had a house and garden like theirs, only larger, and beside a blue sea where it was warm always. Honora had told them so, and colour was lent to her assertions by the fact that their mother, when they repeated this to her, only smiled sadly, and brushed her eyes with her handkerchief. She was even more beautiful when she did so, Edith told her, — a remark which caused Mrs. Hanbury to scan her younger daughter closely; it smacked of Honora.

"Was Cousin Randolph handsome?" Edith demanded.

Mrs. Hanbury started, so vividly there arose before her eyes a brave and dashing figure, clad in grey English cloth, walking by her side on a sunny autumn morning in the Rue de la Paix. Well she remembered that trip abroad with her mother, Randolph's aunt, and how attentive he was, and showed them the best restaurants in which to dine. He had only been in France a short time, but his knowledge of restaurants and the world in general had been amazing, and his acquaintances legion. He had a way, which there was no resisting, of taking people by storm.



"Yes, dear," answered Mrs. Hanbury, absently, when the child repeated the question, "he was very handsome."

"Honora says he would have been President," put in George. "Of course I don't believe it. She said they lived in a palace by the sea in the south of France, with gardens and fountains and a lot of things like that, and princesses and princes and eunuchs—"

"And what!" exclaimed Mrs. Hanbury, aghast.

"I know," said George, contemptuously, "she got that out of the 'Arabian Nights.'" But this suspicion did not prevent him, the next time Honora regaled them with more adventures of the palace by the summer seas, from listening with a rapt attention. No two tales were ever alike. His admiration for Honora did not wane, but increased. It differed from that of his sisters, however, in being a tribute to her creative faculties, while Edith's breathless faith pictured her cousin as having passed through as many adventures as Queen Esther. George paid her a characteristic compliment, but chivalrously drew her aside to bestow it. He was not one to mince matters.

"You're a wonder, Honora," he said. "If I could lie like that, I wouldn't want a pony."

He was forced to draw back a little from the heat of the conflagration he had kindled.

"George Hanbury," she cried, "don't you ever speak to me again! Never! Do you understand?"

It was thus that George, at some cost, had made a considerable discovery which, for the moment, shook even his scepticism. Honora believed it all herself.

Cousin Eleanor Hanbury was a person, or personage, who took a deep and abiding interest in her fellow-beings, and the old clothes of the Hanbury family went unerringly to the needy whose figures most resembled those of the original owners. For Mrs. Hanbury had a wide but comparatively unknown charity list. She was, secretly, one of the many providences which Honora accepted collectively, although it is by no means certain whether Honora, at this period, would have thanked her cousin for tuition at Miss Farmer's school, and for her daily tasks at French and music concerning which Aunt Mary was so particular. On the memorable Christmas morning when, arrayed in green velvet, she arrived with her aunt and uncle for dinner in Wayland Square, Cousin Eleanor drew Aunt Mary into her bedroom and shut the door, and handed her a sealed envelope. Without opening it, but guessing with much accuracy its contents, Aunt Mary handed it back.

"You are doing too much, Eleanor," she said.

Mrs. Hanbury was likewise a direct person.

"I will take it back on one condition, Mary. If you will tell me that Tom has finished paying Randolph's debts."

Mrs. Leffingwell was silent.

"I thought not," said Mrs. Hanbury. "Now Randolph was my own cousin, and I insist."

Aunt Mary turned over the envelope, and there followed a few moments' silence, broken only by the distant clamour of tin horns and other musical instruments of the season.

"I sometimes think, Mary, that Honora is a little like Randolph, and — Mrs. Randolph. Of course, I did not know her."

"Neither did I," said Aunt Mary.

"Mary," said Mrs. Hanbury, again, "I realize how you worked to make the child that velvet coat. Do you think you ought to dress her that way?"

"I don't see why she shouldn't be as well dressed as the children of my friends, Eleanor."

Mrs. Hanbury laid her hand impulsively on Aunt Mary's.

"No child I know of dresses half as well," said Mrs. Hanbury. "The trouble you take —"

"Is rewarded," said Aunt Mary.

"Yes," Mrs. Hanbury agreed. "If my own daughters were half as good looking, I should be content. And Honora has an air of race. Oh, Mary, can't you see? I am only thinking of the child's future."

"Do you expect me to take down all my mirrors, Eleanor? If she has good looks," said Aunt Mary, "she has not learned it from my lips."

It was true. Even Aunt Mary's enemies, and she had some, could not accuse her of the weakness of flattery. So Mrs. Hanbury smiled, and dropped the subject.

CHAPTER IV

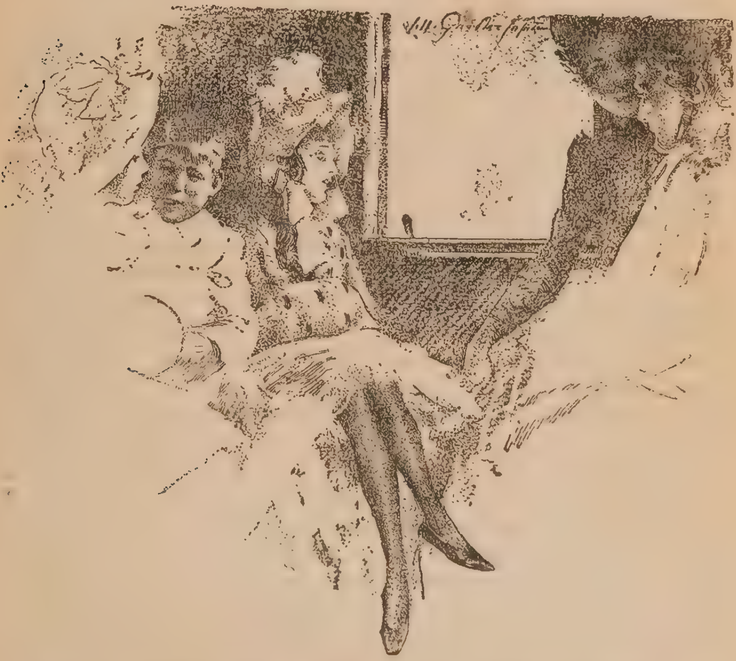
OF TEMPERAMENT

We have the word of Mr. Cyrus Meeker that Honora did not have to learn to dance. The art came to her naturally. Of Mr. Cyrus Meeker, whose mustaches, at the age of five and sixty, are waxed as tight as ever, and whose little legs to-day are as nimble as of yore. He has a memory like Mr. Gladstone's, and can give you a social history of the city that is well worth your time and attention. He will tell you how, for instance, he was kicked by the august feet of Mr. George Hanbury on the occasion of his first lesson to that distinguished young gentleman; and how, although Mr. Meeker's shins were sore, he pleaded nobly for Mr. George, who was sent home in the carriage by himself, — a punishment, by the way, which Mr. George desired above all things.

This celebrated incident occurred in the new ballroom at the top of the new house of young Mrs. Hayden, where the meetings of the dancing class were held weekly. To-day the soot, like the ashes of Vesuvius, spouting from ten thousand soft-coal craters, has buried that house and the whole district fathoms deep in social obscurity. And beautiful Mrs. Hayden — what has become of her? And Lucy Hayden, that doll-like darling of the gods?

All this belongs, however, to another history, which may some day be written. This one is Honora's, and must be got on with, for it is to be a chronicle of lightning changes. Happy we if we can follow Honora, and we must be prepared to make many friends and drop them in the process.

Shortly after Mrs. Hayden had built that palatial house (which had a high fence around its grounds and a driveway leading to a porte-cochère) and had given her initial ball, the dancing class began. It was on a blue afternoon in late November that Aunt Mary and Honora, with Cousin Eleanor and the two girls, and George sulking in a corner of the carriage, were driven through the gates behind Bias and the fat horses of the Hanburys.



Honora has a vivid remembrance of the impression the house made on her, with its polished floors and spacious rooms filled with a new and mysterious and altogether inspiring fashion of things. Mrs. Hayden represented the outposts in the days of Richardson and Davenport — had Honora but known it. This great house was all so different from anything she (and many others in the city) had ever seen. And she stood gazing into the drawing-room, with its curtains and decorously drawn shades, in a rapture which her aunt and cousins were far from guessing.

"Come, Honora," said her aunt. "What's the matter, dear?"

How could she explain to Aunt Mary that the sight of beautiful things gave her a sort of pain — when she did not yet know it herself? There was the massive stairway, for instance, which they ascended, softly lighted by a great leaded window of stained glass on the first landing; and the spacious bedrooms with their shining brass beds and lace spreads (another innovation which Honora resolved to adopt when she married); and at last, far above all, its deep-set windows looking out above the trees towards the park a mile to the westward, the ballroom, — the ballroom, with its mirrors and high chandeliers, and chairs of gilt and blue set against the walls, all of which made no impression whatever upon George and Mary and Edith, but gave Honora a thrill. No wonder that she learned to dance quickly under such an inspiration!

And how pretty Mrs. Hayden looked as she came forward to greet them and kissed Honora! She had been Virginia Grey, and scarce had had a gown to her back when she had married the elderly Duncan Hayden, who had built her this house and presented her with a check-book, — a check-book which Virginia believed to be like the widow's cruse of oil — unfailing. Alas, those days of picnics and balls; of dinners at that recent innovation, the club; of theatre-parties and excursions to baseball games between the young men in Mrs. Hayden's train (and all young men were) who played at Harvard or Yale or Princeton; those days were too care-free to have endured.

"Aunt Mary," asked Honora, when they were home again in the lamplight of the little sitting-room, "why was it that Mr. Meeker was so polite to Cousin Eleanor, and asked her about my dancing — instead of you?"

Aunt Mary smiled.

"Because, Honora," she said, "because I am a person of no importance in Mr. Meeker's eyes."

"If I were a man," cried Honora, fiercely, "I should never rest until I had made enough money to make Mr. Meeker wriggle."

"Honora, come here," said her aunt, gazing in troubled surprise at the tense little figure by the mantel. "I don't know what could have put such things into your head, my child. Money isn't everything. In times of real trouble it cannot save one."

"But it can save one from humiliation!" exclaimed Honora, unexpectedly. Another sign of a peculiar precociousness, at fourteen, with which Aunt Mary was finding herself unable to cope. "I would rather be killed than humiliated by Mr. Meeker."

Whereupon she flew out of the room and upstairs, where old Catherine, in dismay, found her sobbing a little later.

Poor Aunt Mary! Few people guessed the spirit which was bound up in her, aching to extend its sympathy and not knowing how, save by an unswerving and undemonstrative devotion. Her words of comfort were as few as her silent deeds were many.

But Honora continued to go to the dancing class, where she treated Mr. Meeker with a hauteur that astonished him, amused Virginia Hayden, and perplexed Cousin Eleanor. Mr. Meeker's cringing soul responded, and in a month Honora was the leading spirit of the class, led the marches, and was pointed out by the little dancing master as all that a lady should be in deportment and bearing.

This treatment, which succeeded so well in Mr. Meeker's case, Honora had previously applied to others of his sex. Like most people with a future, she began young. Of late, for instance, Mr. George Hanbury had shown a tendency to regard her as his personal property; for George had a high-handed way with him, — boys being an enigma to his mother. Even in those days he had a bullet head and a red face and square shoulders, and was rather undersized for his age — which was Honora's.

Needless to say, George did not approve of the dancing class; and let it be known, both by words and deeds, that he was there under protest. Nor did he regard with favour Honora's triumphal progress, but sat in a corner with several congenial spirits whose feelings ranged from scorn to despair, commenting in loud whispers upon those of his sex to whom the terpsichorean art came more naturally. Upon one Algernon Cartwright, for example, whose striking likeness to the Van Dyck portrait of a young king had been more than once commented upon by his elders, and whose velveteen suits enhanced the resemblance. Algernon, by the way, was the favourite male pupil of Mr. Meeker; and, on occasions, Algernon and Honora were called upon to give exhibitions for the others, the sight of which filled George with contemptuous rage. Algernon danced altogether too much with Honora, — so George informed his cousin.

The simple result of George's protests was to make Honora dance with Algernon the more, evincing, even at this period of her career, a commendable determination to resent dictation. George should have lived in the Middle Ages, when the spirit of modern American womanhood was as yet unborn. Once he contrived, by main force, to drag her out into the hall.

"George," she said, "perhaps, if you'd let me alone — perhaps I'd like you better."

"Perhaps," he retorted fiercely, "if you wouldn't make a fool of yourself with those mother's darlings, I'd like you better."

"George," said Honora, "learn to dance."

"Never!" he cried, but she was gone. While hovering around the door he heard Mrs. Hayden's voice.

"Unless I am tremendously mistaken, my dear," that lady was remarking to Mrs. Dwyer, whose daughter Emily's future millions were powerless to compel youths of fourteen to dance with her, although she is now happily married, "unless I am mistaken, Honora will have a career. The child will be a raving beauty. And she has to perfection the art of managing men."

"As her father had the art of managing women," said Mrs. Dwyer. "Dear me, how well I remember Randolph! I would have followed him to — to Cheyenne."

Mrs. Hayden laughed. "He never would have gone to Cheyenne, I imagine," she said.

"He never looked at me, and I have reason to be profoundly thankful for it," said Mrs. Dwyer.

Virginia Hayden bit her lip. She remembered a saying of Mrs. Brice, "Blessed are the ugly, for they shall not be tempted."

"They say that poor Tom Leffingwell has not yet finished paying his debts," continued Mrs. Dwyer, "although his uncle, Eleanor Hanbury's father, cancelled what Randolph had had from him in his will. It was twenty-five thousand dollars. James Hanbury, you remember, had him appointed consul at Nice. Randolph Leffingwell gave the impression of conferring a favour when he borrowed money. I cannot understand why he married that penniless and empty-headed beauty."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Hayden, "it was because of his ability to borrow money that he felt he could afford to."

The eyes of the two ladies unconsciously followed Honora about the room.

"I never knew a better or a more honest woman than Mary Leffingwell, but I tremble for her. She is utterly incapable of managing that child. If Honora is a complicated mechanism now, what will she be at twenty? She has elements in her which poor Mary never dreamed of. I overheard her with Emily, and she talks like a grown-up person."

Mrs. Hayden's dimples deepened.

"Better than some grown-up women," she said. "She sat in my room while I dressed the other afternoon. Mrs. Leffingwell had sent her with a note about that French governess. And, by the way, she speaks French as though she had lived in Paris."

Little Mrs. Dwyer raised her hands in protest.

"It doesn't seem natural, somehow. It doesn't seem exactly — moral, my dear."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Hayden. "Mrs. Leffingwell is only giving the child the advantages which her companions have — Emily has French, hasn't she?"

"But Emily can't speak it — that way," said Mrs. Dwyer. "I don't blame Mary Leffingwell. She thinks she is doing her duty, but it has always seemed to me that Honora was one of those children who would better have been brought up on bread and butter and jam."

"Honora would only have eaten the jam," said Mrs. Hayden. "But I love her."

"I, too, am fond of the child, but I tremble for her. I am afraid she has that terrible thing which is called temperament."

George Hanbury made a second heroic rush, and dragged Honora out once more.

"What is this disease you've got?" he demanded.

"Disease?" she cried; "I haven't any disease."

"Mrs Dwyer says you have temperament, and that it is a terrible thing."

Honora stopped him in a corner.

"Because people like Mrs. Dwyer haven't got it," she declared, with a warmth which George found inexplicable.

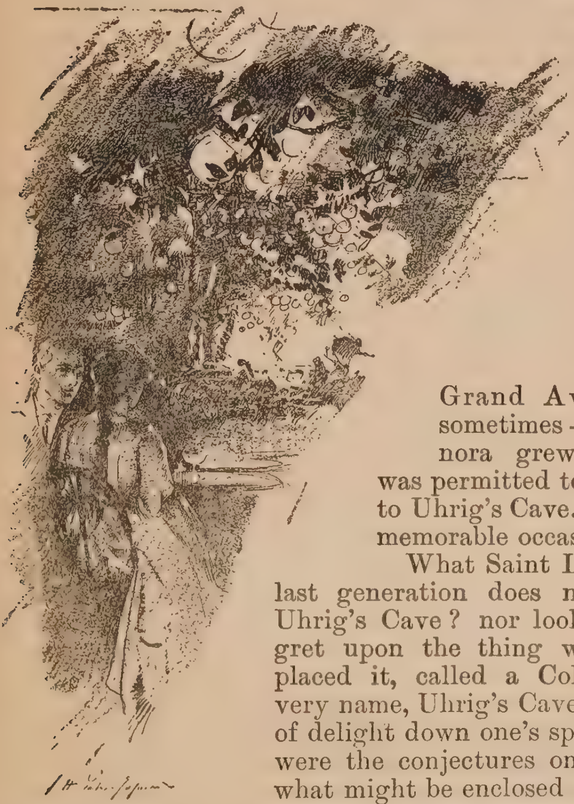
"What is it?" he demanded.

"You'll never know, either, George," she answered; "it's soul."

"Soul!" he repeated; "I have one, and its immortal," he added promptly.

In the summer, that season of desolation for Honora, when George Hanbury and Algernon Cartwright and other young gentlemen were at the seashore learning to sail boats and to play tennis, Peter Erwin came to his own. Nearly every evening after dinner, while the light was still lingering under the shade trees of the street, and Aunt Mary still placidly sewing in the wicker chair on the lawn, and Uncle Tom making the tour of flowers with his watering pot, the gate would slam, and Peter's tall form appear.

It never occurred to Honora that had it not been for Peter those evenings would have been even less bearable than they were. To sit indoors with a light and read in a St. Louis midsummer was not to be thought of. Peter played backgammon with her on the front steps, and later on — chess. Sometimes they went for a walk as far as Grand Avenue. And sometimes — when Honora grew older — she was permitted to go with him to Uhrig's Cave. Those were memorable occasions indeed!



What Saint Louisan of the last generation does not remember Uhrig's Cave? nor look without regret upon the thing which has replaced it, called a Coliseum? The very name, Uhrig's Cave, sent a shiver of delight down one's spine, and many were the conjectures one made as to what might be enclosed in that half a block of impassible brick wall, over which the great trees stretched their branches. Honora, from comparative infancy, had her own theory, which so possessed the mind of Edith Hanbury that she would not look at the wall when they passed in the carriage. It was a still and sombre place by day; and sometimes, if you listened, you could hear the whisperings of the forty thieves on the other side of the wall. But no one had ever dared to cry "Open, Sesâmê!" at the great wooden gates.

At night, in the warm season, when well brought up children were at home or at the seashore, strange things were said to happen at Uhrig's Cave.

Honora was a tall slip of a girl of sixteen before it was given her to know these mysteries, and the Ali Baba theory a thing of the past. Other theories had replaced it. Nevertheless she clung tightly to Peter's arm as they walked down Locust Street and came in sight of the wall. Above it, and under the big trees, shone a thousand glittering lights: there was a crowd at the gate, and instead of saying, "Open, Sesâmê," Peter slipped two bright fifty-cent pieces to the red-faced German ticket-man, and in they went.

First and most astounding of disillusions of passing childhood, it was not a cave at all! And yet the word "disillusion" does not apply. It was, after all, the most enchanting and exciting of spots, to make one's eye shine and one's heart beat. Under the trees were hundreds of tables surrounded by hovering ministering angels in white, and if you were German, they brought you beer; if American, ice-cream. Beyond the tables was a stage, with footlights already set and orchestra tuning up, and a curtain on which was represented a gentleman making decorous love to a lady beside a fountain. As in a dream, Honora followed Peter to a table, and he handed her a programme.

"Oh, Peter," she cried, "it's going to be 'Pinafore'!"

Honora's eyes shone like stars, and elderly people at the neighbouring tables turned more than once to smile at her that evening. And Peter turned more than once and smiled too. But Honora did not consider Peter. He was merely Providence in one of many disguises, and Providence is accepted by his beneficiaries as a matter of fact.

The rapture of a young lady of temperament is a difficult thing to picture. The bird may feel it as he soars, on a bright August morning, high above amber cliffs jutting out into indigo seas; the novelist may feel it when the four walls of his room magically disappear and the profound secrets of the universe are on the point of revealing themselves. Honora gazed, and listened, and lost herself. She was no longer in Uhrig's Cave, but in the great world, her soul a-quiver with harmonies.

"Pinafore," although a comic opera, held something tragic for Honora, and opened the flood-gates to dizzy sensations which she did not understand. How little Peter, who drummed on the table to the tune of

"Give three cheers and one cheer more
For the hearty captain of the *Pinafore*,"

imagined what was going on beside him! There were two factors in his pleasure; he liked the music, and he enjoyed the delight of Honora.

What is Peter? Let us cease looking at him through Honora's eyes and taking him like daily bread, to be eaten and not thought about. From one point of view, he is twenty-nine and elderly, with a sense of humour unsuspected by young persons of temperament. Strive as we will, we have only been able to see him in his rôle of Providence, or of the piper. Has he no existence, no purpose in life outside of that perpetual gentleman in waiting? If so, Honora has never considered it.

After the finale had been sung and the curtain dropped for the last time, Honora sighed and walked out of the garden as one in a trance. Once in a while, as he found a way for them through the crowd, Peter glanced down at her, and something like a smile tugged at the corners of a decidedly masculine mouth, and lit up his eyes. Suddenly, at Locust Street, under the lamp, she stopped and surveyed him. She saw a very real, very human individual, clad in a dark nondescript suit of clothes which had been bought ready-made, and plainly without the bestowal of much thought, on Fifth Street. The fact that they were a comparative fit was in itself a tribute to the enterprise of the Excelsior Clothing Company, for Honora's observation that he was too long one way had been just. He was too tall, his shoulders were too high, his nose too prominent, his eyes too deep-set ; and he wore a straw hat with the brim turned up.

To Honora his appearance was as familiar as the picture of the Pope which had always stood on Catherine's bureau. But to-night, by grace of some added power of vision, she saw him with new and critical eyes. She was surprised to discover that he was possessed of a quality with which she had never associated him — youth. Not to put it too strongly — comparative youth.

"Peter," she demanded, "why do you dress like that?"

"Like what?" he said.

Honora seized the lapel of his coat.

"Like that," she repeated. "Do you know, if you wore different clothes, you might almost be distinguished looking. Don't laugh. I think it's horrid of you always to laugh when I tell you things for your own good."

"It was the idea of being almost distinguished looking that — that gave me a shock," he assured her repentantly.

"You should dress on a different principle," she insisted.

Peter appeared dazed.

"I couldn't do that," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because — because I don't dress on any principle now."

"Yes, you do," said Honora, firmly. "You dress on the principle of the wild beasts and fishes. It's all in our natural history at Miss Farmer's. The crab is the colour of the seaweed, and the deer of the thicket. It's a device of nature for the protection of weak things."

Peter drew himself up proudly.

"I have always understood, Miss Leffingwell, that the king of beasts was somewhere near the shade of the jungle."

Honora laughed in spite of this apparent refutation of her theory of his apparel, and shook her head.

"Do be serious, Peter. You'd make much more of an impression on people if you wore clothes that had — well, a little more distinction."

"What's the use of making an impression if you can't follow it up?" he said.

"You can," she declared. "I never thought of it until to-night, but you must have a great deal in you to have risen all the way from an errand boy in the bank to a lawyer."

"Look out!" he cautioned her; "I shall become insupportably conceited."

"A little more conceit wouldn't hurt you," said Honora, critically. "You'll forgive me, Peter, if I tell you from time to time what I think. It's for your own good."

"I try to realize that," replied Peter, humbly. "How do you wish me to dress—like Mr. Rossiter?"

The picture evoked of Peter arrayed like Mr. Harland Rossiter, who had sent flowers to two generations and was preparing to send more to a third, was irresistible. Every city, hamlet, and village has its Harland Rossiter. He need not be explained. But Honora soon became grave again.

"No, but you ought to dress as though you were somebody, and different from the ordinary man on the street."

"But I'm not," objected Peter.

"Oh," cried Honora, "don't you want to be? I can't understand any man not wanting to be. If I were a man, I wouldn't stay here a day longer than I had to."

Peter was silent as they went in at the gate and opened the door, for on this festive occasion they were provided with a latchkey. He turned up the light in the hall to behold a transformation quite as wonderful as any contained in the "Arabian Nights" or Keightley's "Fairy Mythology." This was not the Honora with whom he had left the house scarce three hours before! The cambric dress, to be sure, was still no longer than the tops of her ankles. and the hair still hung in a heavy braid down her back, These were positively all that remained of the original

Honora, and the change had occurred in the incredibly brief space required for the production of the opera "Pinafore." This Honora was a woman in a strange and disturbing state of exaltation, whose eyes beheld a vision. And Peter, although he had been the subject of her conversation, well knew that he was not included in the vision. He smiled a little as he looked at her. It is becoming apparent that he is one of those unfortunate unimaginative beings incapable of great illusions.

"You're not going!" she exclaimed.

He glanced significantly at the hall clock.

"Why, it's long after bedtime, Honora."

"I don't want to go to bed. I feel like talking," she declared. "Come, let's sit on the steps awhile. If you go home, I shan't go to sleep for hours, Peter."

"And what would Aunt Mary say to me?" he inquired.

"Oh, she wouldn't care. She wouldn't even know it."

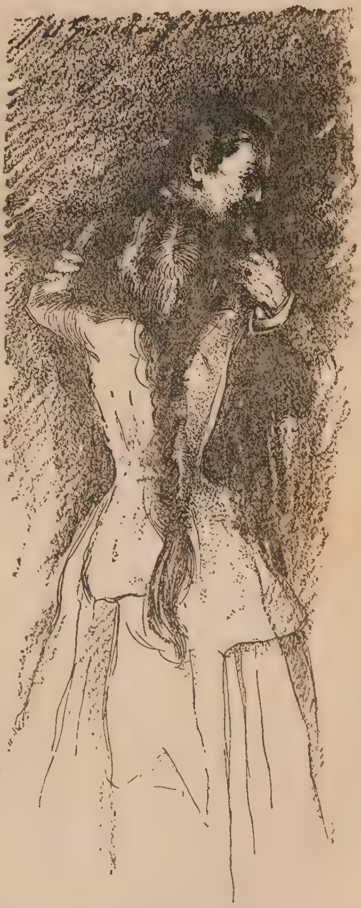
He shook his head, still smiling.

"I'd never be allowed to take you to Uhrig's Cave, or anywhere else, again," he replied. "I'll come to-morrow evening, and you can talk to me then."

"I shan't feel like it then," she said in a tone that implied his opportunity was now or never. But seeing him still obdurate, with startling suddenness she flung her arms around his neck — a method which at times had succeeded marvellously — and pleaded coaxingly: "Only a quarter of an hour, Peter. I've got so many things to say, and I know I shall forget them by to-morrow."

It was a night of wonders. To her astonishment the hitherto pliant Peter, who only existed in order to do her will, became transformed into a brusque masculine creature which she did not recognize. With a movement that was almost rough he released himself and fled, calling back a "good night" to her out of the darkness. He did not even wait to assist her in the process of locking up. Honora, profoundly puzzled, stood for a while in the doorway gazing out into the night. When at length she turned, she had forgotten him entirely.

It was true that she did not sleep for hours, and on awaking the next morning another phenomenon awaited her. The "little house under the hill" was immeasurably shrunken. Poor Aunt Mary, who did not understand that a performance of "Pinafore" could give birth to the unfulfilled longings which result in the creation of high things, spoke to Uncle Tom a week later concerning an astonishing and apparently abnormal access of industry.



"She's been reading all day long, Tom, or else shut up in her room, where Catherine tells me she is writing. I'm afraid Eleanor Hanbury is right when she says I don't understand the child. And yet she is the same to me as though she were my own."

It was true that Honora was writing, and that the door was shut, and that she did not feel the heat. In one of the bookcases she had chanced upon that immortal biography of Dr. Johnson, and upon the letters of another prodigy of her own sex, Madame d'Arblay, whose romantic début as an authoress was an inspiration in itself. Honora actually quivered when she read of Dr. Johnson's first conversation with Miss Burney. To write a book of the existence of which even one's own family did not know, to publish it under a nom de plume, and to awake one day to fêtes and fame would be indeed to live!

Unfortunately Honora's novel no longer exists, or the world might have discovered a second Evelina. A regard for truth compels the statement that it was never finished. But what rapture while the fever lasted! Merely to take up the pen was to pass magically through marble portals into the great world itself.

The Sir Charles Grandison of this novel was, needless to say, not Peter Erwin. He was none other than Mr. Randolph Leffingwell, under a very thin disguise.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH PROVIDENCE KEEPS FAITH

Two more years have gone by, limping in the summer and flying in the winter, two more years of conquests. For our heroine appears to be one of the daughters of Helen, born to make trouble for warriors and others — and even for innocent bystanders like Peter Erwin. Peter was debarred from entering those brilliant lists in which apparel played so great a part. George Hanbury, Guy Rossiter, Algernon Cartwright, Eliphalet Hopper Dwyer — familiarly known as "Hoppy" — and other young gentlemen whose names are now but memories, each had his brief day of triumph. Arrayed like Solomon in wonderful clothes from the mysterious and luxurious East, they returned at Christmas-tide and Easter from college to break lances over Honora. Let us say it boldly — she was like that: she had the world-old knack of sowing discord and despair in the souls of young men. She was — as those who had known that fascinating gentleman were not slow to remark — Randolph Leffingwell over again.

During the festival seasons, Uncle Tom averred, they wore out the latch on the front gate. If their families possessed horses to spare, they took Honora driving in Forest Park; they escorted her to those anomalous dances peculiar to their innocent age, which are neither children's parties nor full-fledged balls; their presents, while of no intrinsic value — as one young gentleman said in a presentation speech — had an enormous, if shy, significance.

"What a beautiful ring you are wearing, Honora," Uncle Tom remarked slyly one April morning at breakfast; "let me see it."

Honora blushed, and hid her hand under the table-cloth.

And the ring—suffice it to say that her little finger was exactly insertable in a ten-cent piece from which everything had been removed but the milling: removed with infinite loving patience by Mr. Rossiter, and at the expense of much history and philosophy and other less important things, in his college bedroom at New Haven. Honora wore it for a whole week; a triumph indeed for Mr. Rossiter; when it was placed in a box in Honora's bedroom, which contained other gifts—not all from him—and many letters, in the writing of which learning had likewise suffered. The immediate cause of the putting away of this ring was said to be the renowned Clinton Howe, who was on the Harvard football eleven, and who visited Mr. George Hanbury that Easter. Fortunate indeed the tailor who was called upon to practise his art on an Adonis like Mr. Howe, and it was remarked that he scarcely left Honora's side at the garden party and dance which Mrs. Dwyer gave in honour of the returning heroes, on the Monday of Easter week.

This festival, on which we should like to linger, but cannot, took place at the new Dwyer residence. For six months the Victorian mansion opposite Uncle Tom's house had been sightless, with blue blinds drawn down inside the plate glass windows. And the yellow stone itself was not so yellow as it once had been, but had now the appearance of soiled manilla wrapping paper, with black streaks here and there where the soot had run. The new Dwyer house was of grey stone, Georgian and palatial, with a picture-gallery twice the size of the old one; a magnificent and fitting pioneer in a new city of palaces.

Westward the star of Empire—away from the smoke. The Dwyer mansion, with its lawns and gardens and heavily balustraded terrace, faced the park that stretched away like a private estate to the south and west. That same park with its huge trees and black forests that was *Ultima Thule* in Honora's childhood; in the open places there had been real farms and hayricks which she used to slide down with Peter while Uncle Tom looked for wild flowers in the fields. It had been separated from the city in those days by an endless country road, like a Via Claudia stretching towards mysterious Germanian forests, and it was deemed a feat for Peter to ride thither on his big-wheeled bicycle. Forest Park was the country, and all that the country represented in Honora's childhood. For Uncle Tom on a summer's day to hire a surrey at Braintree's Livery Stable and drive thither was like — to what shall that bliss be compared in these days when we go to Europe with indifference?

And now Lindell Road — the Via Claudia of long ago — had become Lindell Boulevard, with granitoid sidewalks. And the dreary fields through which it had formerly run were bristling with new houses in no sense Victorian, and which were the first stirrings of a national sense of the artistic. The old horse-cars with the clanging chains had disappeared, and you could take an electric to within a block of the imposing grille that surrounded the Dwyer grounds. Westward the star!

Fading fast was the glory of that bright new district on top of the second hill from the river where Uncle Tom was a pioneer. Soot had killed the pear trees, the apricots behind the lattice fence had withered away; asphalt and soot were slowly sapping the vitality of the maples on the sidewalk; and sometimes Uncle Tom's roses looked as though they might advantageously be given a coat of paint, like those in Alice in Wonderland. Honora should have lived in the Dwyers' mansion — people who are capable of judging said so. People who saw her at the garden party said she had the air of belonging in such surroundings much more than Emily, whom even budding womanhood had not made beautiful. And Eliphalet Hopper Dwyer, if his actions meant anything, would have welcomed her to that house, or built her another twice as fine, had she deigned to give him the least encouragement.

Cinderella! This was what she facetiously called herself one July morning of that summer she was eighteen. Cinderella in more senses than one, for never had the city seemed more dirty or more deserted, or indeed, more stifling. Winter and its festivities were a dream laid away in moth balls. Surely Cinderella's life had held no greater contrasts! To this day the odour of matting brings back to Honora the sense of closed shutters; of a stifling south wind stirring their slats at noonday; the vision of Aunt Mary, cool and placid in a cambric sacque, sewing by the window in the upper hall, and the sound of fruit venders crying in the street, or of ragmen in the alley — "Rags, bottles, old iron!" What memories of endless, burning, lonely days come rushing back with those words!

When the sun had sufficiently heated the bricks of the surrounding houses in order that he might not be forgotten during the night, he slowly departed. If Honora took her book under the maple tree in the yard, she was confronted with that hideous wooden sign "To Let" on the Dwyer's iron fence opposite, and the grass behind it was unkempt and overgrown with weeds. Aunt Mary took an unceasing and (to Honora's mind) morbid interest in the future of that house.

"I suppose it will be a boarding-house," she would say, "it's much too large for poor people to rent, and only poor people are coming into this district now."

"Oh, Aunt Mary!"

"Well, my dear, why should we complain? We are poor, and it is appropriate that we should live among the poor. Sometimes I think it is a pity that you should have been thrown all your life with rich people, my child. I am afraid it has made you discontented. It is no disgrace to be poor. We ought to be thankful that we have everything we need."

Honora put down her sewing. For she had learned to sew — Aunt Mary had insisted upon that, as well as French. She laid her hand upon her aunt's.

"I am thankful," she said, and her aunt little guessed the intensity of the emotion she was seeking to control, or imagined the hidden fires. "But sometimes — sometimes I try to forget that we are poor. Perhaps — some day we shall not be."

It seemed to Honora that Aunt Mary derived a real pleasure from the contradiction of this hope. She shook her head vigorously.

"We shall always be, my child. Your Uncle Tom is getting old, and he has always been too honest to make a great deal of money. And besides," she added, "he has not that kind of ability."

Uncle Tom might be getting old, but he seemed to Honora to be of the same age as in her childhood. Some people never grow old, and Uncle Tom was one of these. Fifteen years before he had been promoted to be the cashier of the Prairie Bank, and he was the cashier to-day. He had the same quiet smile, the same quiet humour, the same calm acceptance of life. He seemed to bear no grudge even against that ever advancing enemy, the soot, which made it increasingly difficult for him to raise his flowers. Those which would still grow he washed tenderly night and morning with his watering-pot. The greatest wonders are not at the ends of the earth, but near us. It was to take many years for our heroine to realize this.

Strong faith alone could have withstood the continued contact with such a determined fatalism as Aunt Mary's, and yet it is interesting to note that Honora's belief in her providence never wavered. A prince was to come who was to bear her away from the ragmen and the boarding-houses and the soot: and incidentally and in spite of herself, Aunt Mary was to come too, and Uncle Tom. And sometimes when she sat reading of an evening under the maple, her book would fall to her lap and the advent of this personage become so real a thing that she bounded when the gate slammed — to find that it was only Peter.

It was preposterous, of course, that Peter should be a prince in disguise. Peter who, despite her efforts to teach him distinction in dress, insisted upon wearing the same kind of clothes. A mild kind of providence, Peter, whose modest functions were not unlike those of the third horse which used to be hitched on to the street car at the foot of the Seventeenth-Street hill: it was Peter's task to help pull Honora through the interminable summers. Uhrig's Cave was an old story now: mysteries were no longer to be expected in St. Louis. There was a great panorama — or something to that effect — in the wilderness at the end of one of the new electric lines, where they sometimes went to behold the White Squadron of the new United States Navy engaged in battle with mimic forts on a mimic sea, on the very site where the country place of Madame Clément had been. The mimic sea, surrounded by wooden stands filled with common people eating peanuts and popcorn, was none other than Madame Clément's pond, which Honora remembered as a spot of enchantment. And they went out in the open cars with these same people, who stared at Honora as though she had got in by mistake, but always politely gave her a seat. And Peter thanked them. Sometimes he fell into conversations with them, and it was noticeable that they nearly always shook hands with him at parting. Honora did not approve of this familiarity.

"But they may be clients some day," he argued — a frivolous answer to which she never deigned to reply.

Just as one used to take for granted that third horse which pulled the car uphill, so Peter was taken for granted. He might have been on the highroad to a renown like that of Chief Justice Marshall, and Honora had been none the wiser.

"Well, Peter," said Uncle Tom at dinner one evening of that memorable summer, when Aunt Mary was helping the blackberries, and incidentally deploring that she did not live in the country, because of the cream one got there, "I saw Judge Brice in the bank to-day, and he tells me you covered yourself with glory in that iron foundry suit."

"The Judge must have his little joke, Mr. Leffingwell," replied Peter, but he reddened nevertheless.

Honora thought winning an iron foundry suit a strange way to cover one's self with glory. It was not, at any rate, her idea of glory. What were lawyers for, if not to win suits? And Peter was a lawyer.

"In five years," said Uncle Tom, "the firm will be Brice and Erwin. You mark my words. And by that time," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "you'll be ready to marry Honora."

"Tom," reproved Aunt Mary, gently, "you oughtn't to say such things."

This time there was no doubt about Peter's blush. He fairly burned. Honora looked at him and laughed.

"Peter is meant for an old bachelor," she said.

"If he remains a bachelor," said Uncle Tom, "he'll be the greatest waste of good material I know of. And if you succeed in getting him, Honora, you'll be the luckiest young woman of my acquaintance."

"Tom," said Aunt Mary, "it was all very well to talk that way when Honora was a child. But now — she may not wish to marry Peter. And Peter may not wish to marry her."

Even Peter joined in the laughter at this literal and characteristic statement of the case.

"It's more than likely," said Honora, wickedly. "He hasn't kissed me for two years."

"Why, Peter, " said Uncle Tom, "you act as though it were warm to-night. It was only seventy when we came in to dinner."

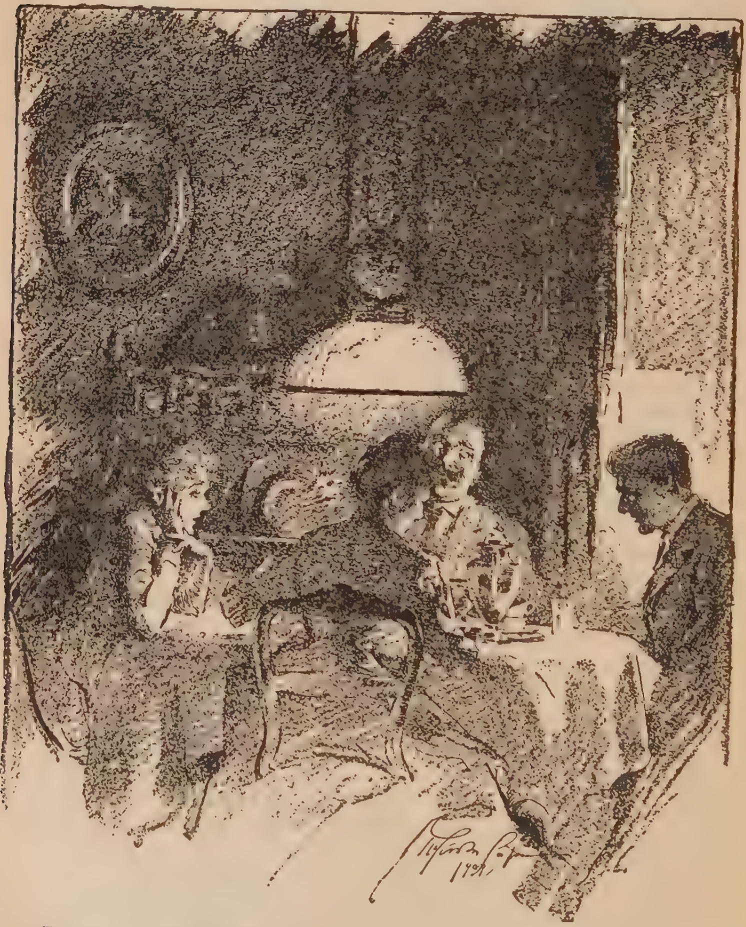
"Take me out to the park," commanded Honora.

"Tom," said Aunt Mary, as she stood on the step and watched them cross the street, "I wish the child would marry him. Not now, of course," she added hastily, a little frightened by her own admission, "but later. Sometimes I worry over her future. She needs a strong and sensible man. I don't understand Honora. I never did. I always told you so. Sometimes I think she may be capable of doing something foolish like — like Randolph."

Uncle Tom patted his wife on the shoulder.

"Don't borrow trouble, Mary," he said, smiling a little. "The child is only full of spirits. But she has a good heart. It is only human that she should want things that we cannot give her."

"I wish," said Aunt Mary, "that she were not quite so good-looking."



Uncle Tom laughed.

"You needn't tell me you're not proud of it," he declared.

"And I have given her," she continued, "a taste for dress."

"I think, my dear," said her husband, "that there were others who contributed to that."

"It was my own vanity. I should have combated the tendency in her," said Aunt Mary.

"If you had dressed Honora in calico, you could not have changed her," replied Uncle Tom, with conviction.

In the meantime Honora and Peter had mounted the electric car, and were speeding westward. They had a seat to themselves, the very first one on the "grip" — that survival of the days of cable cars. Honora's eyes brightened as she held on to her hat, and the stray wisps of hair about her neck stirred in the breeze.

"Oh, I wish we would never stop, until we came to the Pacific Ocean!" she exclaimed.

"Would you be content to stop then?" he asked. He had a trick of looking downward with a quizzical expression in his dark grey eyes.

"No," said Honora. "I should want to go on and see everything in the world worth seeing. Sometimes I feel positively as though I should die if I had to stay here in St. Louis."

"You probably would die — eventually," said Peter.

Honora was justifiably irritated.

"I could *shake* you, Peter!"

He laughed.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't do any good," he answered.

"If I were a man," she proclaimed, "I shouldn't stay here. I'd go to New York — I'd be somebody — I'd make a national reputation for myself."

"I believe you would," said Peter sadly, but with a glance of admiration.

"That's the worst of being a woman — we have to sit still until something happens to us."

"What would you like to happen?" he asked, curiously. And there was a note in his voice which she, intent upon her thoughts, did not remark.

"Oh, I don't know," she said; "anything — anything to get out of this rut and be something in the world. It's dreadful to feel that one has power and not be able to use it."

The car stopped at the terminal. Thanks to the early hour of Aunt Mary's dinner, the western sky was still aglow with the sunset over the forests as they walked past the closed grille of the Dwyer mansion into the park. Children rolled on the grass, while mothers and fathers, tired out from the heat and labour of a city day, sat on the benches. Peter stooped down and lifted a small boy, painfully thin, who had fallen, weeping, on the gravel walk. He took his handkerchief and wiped the scratch on the child's forehead.

"There, there!" he said, smiling, "it's all right now. We must expect a few tumbles."

The child looked at him, and suddenly smiled through his tears.

The father appeared, a red-headed Irishman.

"Thank you, Mr. Erwin; I'm sure it's very kind of you, sir, to bother with him," he said gratefully. "It's that thin he is with the heat, I take him out for a bit of country air."

"Why, Tim, it's you, is it?" said Peter. "He's the janitor of our building down town," he explained to Honora, who had remained a silent witness to this simple scene. She had been, in spite of herself, impressed by it, and by the mingled respect and affection in the janitor's manner towards Peter. It was so with every one to whom he spoke. They walked on in silence for a few moments, into a path leading to a lake, which had stolen the flaming green-gold of the sky.

"I suppose," said Honora, slowly, "it would be better for me to wish to be contented where I am, as you are. But it's no use trying, I can't."

Peter was not a preacher.

"Oh," he said, "there are lots of things I want."

"What?" demanded Honora, interested. For she had never conceived of him as having any desires whatever.

"I want a house like Mr. Dwyer's," he declared, pointing at the distant imposing roof line against the fading eastern sky.

Honora laughed. The idea of Peter wishing such a house was indeed ridiculous. Then she became grave again.

"There are times when you seem to forget that I have at last grown up, Peter. You never will talk over serious things with me."

"What are serious things?" asked Peter.

"Well," said Honora vaguely, "ambitions, and what one is going to make of themselves in life. And then you make fun of me by saying you want Mr. Dwyer's house." She laughed again. "I can't imagine you in that house."

"Why not?" he asked, stopping beside the pond and thrusting his hands in his pockets. He looked very solemn, but she knew he was smiling inwardly.

"Why — because I can't," she said, and hesitated. The question had forced her to think about Peter. "I can't imagine you living all alone in all that luxury. It isn't like you."

"Why 'all alone'?" asked Peter.

"Don't be ridiculous," she said; "you wouldn't build a house like that, even if you were twice as rich as Mr. Dwyer. You know you wouldn't. And you're not the marrying kind," she added, with the superior knowledge of eighteen.

"I'm waiting for you, Honora," he announced.

"You know I love you, Peter," — so she tempered her reply, for Honora's feelings were tender. What man, even Peter, would not have married her if he could? Of course he was in earnest, despite his bantering tone. — "but I never could — marry you."

"Not even if I were to offer you a house like Mr. Dwyer's?" he said. A remark which betrayed — although not to her — his knowledge of certain earthly strains in his goddess.

The colours faded from the water, and it blackened. As they walked on side by side in the twilight, a consciousness of repressed masculine force, of reserve power, which she had never before felt about Peter Erwin, invaded her; and she was seized with a strange uneasiness. Ridiculous was the thought (which she lost no time in rejecting) that pointed out the true road to happiness in marrying such a man as he. In the gathering darkness she slipped her hand through his arm.

"I wish I could marry you, Peter," she said.

He was fain to take what comfort he could from this expression of good-will. If he was not the Prince Charming of her dreams, she would have liked him to be. A little reflection on his part ought to have shown him the absurdity of the Prince Charming having been there all the time, and in ready-made clothes. And he, too, may have had dreams. We are not concerned with them.

* * * * * * *

If we listen to the still, small voice of realism, intense longing is always followed by disappointment. Nothing should have happened that summer, and Providence should not have come disguised as the postman. It was a sultry day in early September — which is to say that it was comparatively cool — a blue day, with occasional great drops of rain spattering on the brick walk. And Honora was reclining on the hall sofa, reading about Mr. Ibbetson and his duchess, when she perceived the postman's grey uniform and smiling face on the far side of the screen door. He greeted her cordially, and gave her a single letter for Aunt Mary, and she carried it unsuspectingly upstairs.

"It's from Cousin Eleanor," Honora volunteered.

Aunt Mary laid down her sewing, smoothed the ruffles of her sacque, adjusted her spectacles, opened the envelope, and began to read. Presently the letter fell to her lap, and she wiped her glasses and glanced at Honora, who was deep in her book once more. And in Honora's brain, as she read, was ringing the refrain of the prisoner: —

"*Orléans, Beaugency!*
Notre Dame de Cléry!
    Vendôme! Vendôme!
Quel chagrin, quel ennui
De compter toute la nuit
    Les heures, les heures!"

The verse appealed to Honora strangely, just as it had appealed to Ibbetson. Was she not, too, a prisoner? And how often, during the summer days and nights, had she listened to the chimes of the Pilgrim Church near by?

"One, two, three, four!
One, two, three, four!"

After Uncle Tom had watered his flowers that evening, Aunt Mary followed him upstairs and locked the door of their room behind her. Silently she put the letter in his hand. Here is one paragraph of it: —

"I have never asked to take the child from you in the summer, because she has always been in perfect health, and I know how lonely you would have been without her, my dear Mary. But it seems to me that a winter at Sutcliffe, with my girls, would do her a world of good just now. I need not point out to you that Honora is, to say the least, remarkably good looking, and that she has developed very rapidly. And she has, in spite of the strict training you have given her, certain ideas and ambitions which seem to me, I am sorry to say, more or less prevalent among young American women these days. You know it is only because I love her that I am so frank. Miss Turner's influence will, in my opinion, do much to counteract these tendencies."

Uncle Tom folded the letter, and handed it back to his wife.

"I feel that we ought not to refuse, Tom. And I am afraid Eleanor is right."

"Well, Mary, we've had her for seventeen years. We ought to be willing to spare her for—how many months?"

"Nine," said Aunt Mary, promptly. She had counted them. "And Eleanor says she will be home for two weeks at Christmas. Seventeen years! It seems only yesterday when we brought her home, Tom. It was just about this time of day, and she was asleep in your arms, and Bridget opened the door for us." Aunt Mary looked out of the window. "And do you remember how she used to play under the maple there, with her dolls?"

Uncle Tom produced a very large handkerchief, and blew his nose.

"There, there, Mary," he said, "nine months, and two weeks out at Christmas. Nine months in eighteen years."

"I suppose we ought to be very thankful," said Aunt Mary. "But, Tom, the time is coming soon — "

"Tut tut," exclaimed Uncle Tom. He turned, and his eyes beheld a work of art. Nothing less than a porcelain plate, hung in brackets on the wall, decorated by Honora at the age of ten with wild roses, and presented with much ceremony on an anniversary morning. He pretended not to notice it, but Aunt Mary's eyes were too quick. She seized a photograph on her bureau, a photograph of Honora in a little white frock with a red sash.

"It was the year that was taken, Tom."

He nodded. The scene at the breakfast table came back to him, and the sight of Catherine standing respectfully in the hall, and of Honora, in the red sash, making the courtesy the old woman had taught her.

Honora recalled afterwards that Uncle Tom joked even more than usual that evening at dinner. But it was Aunt Mary who asked her, at length, how she would like to go to boarding-school. Such was the matter-of-fact manner in which the portentous news was announced.

"To boarding-school, Aunt Mary?"

Her aunt poured out her uncle's after-dinner coffee.

"I've spilled some, my dear. Get another saucer for your uncle."

Honora went mechanically to the china closet, her heart thumping. She did not stop to reflect that it was the rarest of occurrences for Aunt Mary to spill the coffee.

"Your Cousin Eleanor has invited you to go this winter with Edith and Mary to Sutcliffe."

Sutcliffe! No need to tell Honora what Sutcliffe was — her cousins had talked of little else during the past winter; and shown, if the truth be told, just a little commiseration for Honora. Sutcliffe was not only a famous girls' school, Sutcliffe was the world — that world which, since her earliest remembrances, she had been longing to see and know. In a desperate attempt to realize what had happened to her, she found herself staring hard at the open china closet, at Aunt Mary's best gold dinner set resting on the pink lace paper that had been changed only last week. That dinner set, somehow, was always an augury of festival — when, on the rare occasions Aunt Mary entertained, the little dining room was transformed by it and the Leffingwell silver into a glorified and altogether unrecognizable state, in which any miracle seemed possible.

Honora pushed back her chair. Her lips were parted.

"Oh, Aunt Mary, is it really true that I am going?" she said.

"Why," said Uncle Tom, "what zeal for learning!"

"My dear," said Aunt Mary, who, you may be sure, knew all about that school before Cousin Eleanor's letter came, "Miss Turner insists upon hard work, and the discipline is very strict."

"No young men," added Uncle Tom.

"That," declared Aunt Mary, "is certainly an advantage."

"And no chocolate cake, and bed at ten o'clock," said Uncle Tom.

Honora, dazed, only half heard them. She laughed at Uncle Tom because she always had, but tears were shining in her eyes. Young men and chocolate cake! What were these privations compared to that magic word *Change?* Suddenly she rose, and flung her arms about Uncle Tom's neck and kissed his rough cheek, and then embraced Aunt Mary. They would be lonely.

"Aunt Mary, I can't bear to leave you — but I do so want to go! And it won't be for long — will it? Only until next spring."

"Until next summer, I believe," replied Aunt Mary, gently; "June is a summer month — isn't it, Tom?"

"It will be a summer month without question next year," answered Uncle Tom, enigmatically.

It has been remarked that that day was sultry, and a fine rain was now washing Uncle Tom's flowers for him. It was he who had applied that term "washing" since the era of ultra-soot. Incredible as it may seem, life proceeded as on any other of a thousand rainy nights. The lamps were lighted in the sitting-room, Uncle Tom unfolded his gardening periodical, and Aunt Mary her embroidery. The gate slammed, with its more subdued, rainy-weather sound.

"It's Peter," said Honora, flying downstairs. And she caught him, astonished, as he was folding his umbrella on the step. "Oh, Peter, if you tried until to-morrow morning, you never could guess what has happened."

He stood for a moment, motionless, staring at her, a tall figure, careless of the rain.

"You are going away," he said.

"How did you guess it?" she exclaimed in surprise. "Yes — to boarding-school. To Sutcliffe, on the Hudson, with Edith and Mary. Aren't you glad? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"Do I?" said Peter.

"Don't stand there in the rain," commanded Honora; "come into the parlour, and I'll tell you all about it."

He came in. She took the umbrella from him, and put it in the rack.

"Why don't you congratulate me?" she demanded.

"You'll never come back," said Peter.

"What a horrid thing to say! Of course I shall come back. I shall come back next June, and you'll be at the station to meet me."

"And — what will Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary do — without you?"

"Oh," said Honora, "I shall miss them dreadfully. And I shall miss you, Peter."

"Very much?" he asked, looking down at her with such a queer expression. And his voice, too, sounded queer. He was trying to smile.

Suddenly Honora realized that he was suffering, and she felt the pangs of contrition. She could not remember the time when she had been away from Peter, and it was natural that he should be stricken at the news. Peter, who was the complement of all who loved and served her, of Aunt Mary and Uncle Tom and Catherine, and who somehow embodied them all. Peter, the eternally dependable. She found it natural that the light should be temporarily removed from his firmament while she should be at boarding-school, and yet in the tenderness of her heart she pitied him. She put her hands impulsively upon his shoulders as he stood looking at her with that queer expression which he believed to be a smile.

"Peter, you dear old thing, indeed I shall miss you! I don't know what I shall do without you, and I'll write to you every single week."

Gently he disengaged her arms. They were standing under that which, for courtesy's sake, had always been called the chandelier. It was in the centre of the parlour, and Uncle Tom always covered it with holly and mistletoe at Christmas.

"Why do you say I'll never come back?" asked Honora. "Of course I shall come back, and live here all the rest of my life."

Peter shook his head slowly. He had recovered something of his customary quizzical manner.

"The East is a strange country," he said. "The first thing we know you'll be marrying one of those people we read about, with more millions than there are cars on the Olive Street line."

Honora was a little indignant.

"I wish you wouldn't talk so, Peter," she said. "In the first place, I shan't see any but girls at Sutcliffe. I could only see *you* for a few minutes once a week if you were there. And in the second place, it isn't exactly — well — dignified to compare the East and the West the way you do, and speak about people who are very rich and live there as though they were different from the people we know here. Comparisons, as Shakespeare said, are odorous."

"Honora," he declared, still shaking his head, "you're a fraud, but I can't help loving you."

For a long time that night Honora lay in bed staring into the darkness, and trying to realize what had happened. She heard the whistling and the puffing of the trains in the cinder-covered valley to the southward, but the quality of these sounds had changed. They were music now.

CHAPTER VI

HONORA HAS A GLIMPSE OF THE WORLD

It is simply impossible to give any adequate notion of the industry of the days that followed. No sooner was Uncle Tom out of the house in the morning than Anne Rory marched into the sitting-room and took command, and turned it into a dressmaking establishment. Anne Rory, who deserves more than a passing mention, one of the institutions of Honora's youth, who sewed for the first families, and knew much more about them than Mr. Meeker, the dancing-master. If you enjoyed her confidence, — as Aunt Mary did, — she would tell you of her own accord who gave their servants enough to eat, and who didn't. Anne Rory was a sort of inquisition all by herself, and would have made a valuable chief of police. The reputations of certain elderly gentlemen of wealth might have remained to this day intact had it not been for her; she had a heaven-sent knack of discovering peccadilloes. Anne Rory knew the gentlemen by sight, and the gentlemen did not know Anne Rory. Uncle Tom she held to be somewhere in the calendar of the saints.

There is not time, alas, to linger over Anne Rory or the new histories which she whispered to Aunt Mary when Honora was out of the room. At last the eventful day of departure arrived. Honora's new trunk — her first — was packed by Aunt Mary's own hands, the dainty clothes and the dresses folded in tissue paper, while old Catherine stood sniffing by. After dinner — sign of a great occasion — a carriage came from Braintree's Livery Stable, and Uncle Tom held the horses while the driver carried out the trunk and strapped it on. Catherine, Mary Ann, and Bridget, all weeping, were kissed good-by.

and off they went through the dusk to the station. Not the old Union Depot, with its wooden sheds, where Honora had gone so often to see the Hanburys off, that grimy gateway to the fairer regions of the earth. This new station, of brick and stone and glass and tiles, would hold an army corps with ease. And when they alighted at the carriage entrance, a tall figure came forward out of the shadow. It was Peter, and he had a package under his arm. Peter checked Honora's trunk, and Peter had got the permission — through Judge Brice — which enabled them all to pass through the grille and down the long walk beside which the train was standing.

They entered that hitherto mysterious conveyance, a sleeping-car, and spoke to old Mrs. Stanley, who was going East to see her married daughter, and who had gladly agreed to take charge of Honora. Afterwards they stood on the platform, but in spite of the valiant efforts of Uncle Tom and Peter, conversation was a mockery.

"Honora," said Aunt Mary, "don't forget that your trunk key is in the little pocket on the *left* side of your bag."

"No, Aunt Mary."

"And your little New Testament at the bottom. And your lunch is arranged in three packages. And don't forget to ask Cousin Eleanor about the walking shoes, and to give her my note."

Cries reverberated under the great glass dome, and trains pulled out with deafening roars. Honora had a strange feeling, as of pressure from within, that caused her to take deep breaths of the smoky air. She but half heard what was being said to her: she wished that the train would go, and at the same time she had a sudden, surprising, and fierce longing to stay. She had been able to eat scarcely a mouthful of that festal dinner which Bridget had spent the afternoon in preparing, comprised wholly of forbidden dishes of her childhood, for which Bridget and Aunt Mary were justly famed. Such is the irony of life. Visions of one of Aunt Mary's rare lunch-parties and of a small girl peeping covetously through a crack in the dining-room door, and of the gold china set, rose before her. But she could not eat.

"Bread and jam and tea at Miss Turner's," Uncle Tom had said, and she had tried to smile at him.

And now they were standing on the platform, and the train might start at any moment.

"I trust you won't get like the New Yorkers, Honora," said Aunt Mary. "Do you remember how stiff they were, Tom?" She was still in the habit of referring to that memorable trip when they had brought Honora home. "And they say now that they hold their heads higher than ever."

"That," said Uncle Tom, gravely, "is a local disease, and comes from staring at the tall buildings."

"Uncle Tom!"

Peter presented the parcel under his arm. It was a box of candy, and very heavy, on which much thought had been spent.

"They are some of the things you like," he said, when he had returned from putting it in the berth.

"How good of you, Peter! I shall never be able to eat all that."

"I hope there is a doctor on the train," said Uncle Tom.

"Yassah," answered the black porter, who had been listening with evident relish, "right good doctah — Doctah Lov'ring."

Even Aunt Mary laughed.

"Peter," asked Honora, "can't you get Judge Brice to send you on to New York this winter on law business? Then you could come up to Sutcliffe to see me."

"I'm afraid of Miss Turner," declared Peter.

"Oh, she wouldn't mind you," exclaimed Honora. "I could say you were an uncle. It would be almost true. And perhaps she would let you take me down to New York for a matinée."

"And how about my ready-made clothes?" he said, looking down at her. He had never forgotten that.

Honora laughed.

"You don't seem a bit sorry that I'm going," she replied, a little breathlessly. "You know I'd be glad to see you, if you were in rags."

"All aboard!" cried the porter, grinning sympathetically.

Honora threw her arms around Aunt Mary and clung to her. How small and frail she was! Somehow Honora had never realized it in all her life before.

"Good-by, darling, and remember to put on your thick clothes on the cool days, and write when you get to New York."

Then it was Uncle Tom's turn. He gave her his usual vigorous hug and kiss.

"It won't be long until Christmas," he whispered, and was gone, helping Aunt Mary off the train, which had begun to move.

Peter remained a moment.

"Good-by, Honora. I'll write to you often and let you know how they are. And perhaps — you'll send me a letter once in a while."

"Oh, Peter, I will," she cried. "I can't bear to leave you — I didn't think it would be so hard."

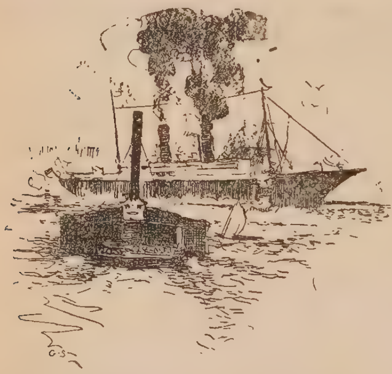
He held out his hand, but she ignored it. Before he realized what had happened to him she had drawn his face to hers, kissed it, and was pushing him off the train. Then she watched from the platform the three receding figures in the yellow smoky light until the car slipped out from under the roof into the blackness of the night. Some faint, premonitory divination of what they represented of immutable love in a changing, heedless, selfish world came to her; rocks to which one might cling, successful or failing, happy or unhappy. For unconsciously she thought of them, all three, as one, a human trinity in which her faith had never been betrayed. She felt a warm moisture on her cheeks, and realized that she was crying with the first real sorrow of her life.

She was leaving them — for what? Honora did not know. There had been nothing imperative in Cousin Eleanor's letter. She need not have gone if she had not wished. Something within herself, she felt, was impelling her. And it is curious to relate that, in her mind, going to school had little or nothing to do with her journey. She had the feeling of faring forth into the world, and she had known all along that it was destined she should. What was the cause of this longing to break the fetters and fly away? fetters of love, they seemed to her now—and were. And the world which she had seen afar, filled with sunlit palaces, seemed very dark and dreary to her to-night.

"The lady's asking for you, Miss," said the porter.

She made a heroic attempt to talk to Mrs. Stanley. But at the sight of Peter's candy, when she opened it, she was blinded once more. Dear Peter! That box was eloquent with the care with which he had studied her slightest desires and caprices. Marrons glacés, and Langtrys, and certain chocolates which had received the stamp of her approval — and she could not so much as eat one! The porter made the berths. And there had been a time when she had asked nothing more of fate than to travel in a sleeping-car! Far into the night she lay wide awake, dry-eyed, watching the lamp-lit streets of the little towns they passed, or staring at the cornfields and pastures in the darkness; thinking of the home she had left, perhaps forever, and wondering whether they were sleeping there; picturing them to-morrow at breakfast without her, and Uncle Tom leaving for the bank, Aunt Mary going through the silent rooms alone, and dear old Catherine haunting the little chamber where she had slept for seventeen years — almost her lifetime. A hundred vivid scenes of her childhood came back, and familiar objects oddly intruded themselves; the red and green lambrequin on the parlour mantel — a present many years ago from Cousin Eleanor; the what-not, with its funny curly legs, and the bare spot near the lock on the door of the cake closet in the dining room!

Youth, however, has its recuperative powers. The next day the excitement of the journey held her, the sight of new cities and a new countryside. But when she tried to eat the lunch Aunt Mary had so carefully put up, new memories assailed her, and she went with Mrs. Stanley into the dining car. The September dusk was made lurid by belching steel furnaces that reddened the heavens; and later, when she went to bed, sharp air and towering contours told her of the mountains. Mountains which her great-grandfather had crossed on horseback, with that very family silver in his saddle-bags which shone on Aunt Mary's table. And then — she awoke with the light shining in her face, and barely had time to dress before the conductor was calling out "Jersey City."



Once more the morning, and with it new and wonderful sensations that dispelled her sorrows; the ferry, the olive-green river rolling in the morning sun, alive with dodging, hurrying craft, each bent upon its destination with an energy, relentlessness, and selfishness of purpose that fascinated Honora. Each, with its shrill, protesting whistle, seemed to say: "My business is the most important. Make way for me." And yet, through them all, towering, stately, imperturbable, a great ocean steamer glided slowly towards the bay, by very might and majesty holding her way serene and undisturbed, on a nobler errand. Honora thrilled as she gazed, as though at last her dream were coming true, and she felt within her the pulse of the world's artery. That irksome sense of spectatorship seemed to fly, and she was part and parcel now of the great, moving things, with sure pinions with which to soar. Standing rapt upon the forward deck of the ferry, she saw herself, not an atom, but one whose going and coming was a thing of consequence. It seemed but a simple step to the deck of that steamer when she, too, would be travelling to the other side of the world, and the journey one of the small incidents of life.

The ferry bumped into its slip, the windlasses sang loudly as they took up the chains, the gates folded back, and Honora was forced with the crowd along the bridge-like passage to the right. Suddenly she saw Cousin Eleanor and the girls awaiting her.

"Honora," said Edith, when the greetings were over and they were all four in the carriage, which was making its way slowly across the dirty and irregularly paved open space to a narrow street that opened between two saloons, "Honora, you don't mean to say that Anne Rory made that street dress? Mother, I believe it's better-looking than the one I got at Bremer's."

"It's very simple," said Honora.

"And she looks fairly radiant," cried Edith, seizing her cousin's hand. "It's quite wonderful, Honora; nobody would ever guess that you were from the West, and that you had spent the whole summer in St. Louis."

Cousin Eleanor smiled a little as she contemplated Honora, who sat, fascinated, gazing out of the window at novel scenes. There was a colour in her cheeks and a sparkle in her eyes. They had reached Madison Square. Madison Square, on a bright morning in late September, seen for the first time by an ambitious young lady who had never been out of St. Louis! The trimly appointed vehicles, the high-stepping horses, the glittering shops, the well-dressed women and well-groomed men — all had an esprit de corps which she found inspiring. On such a morning, and amidst such a scene, she felt that there was no limit to the possibilities of life.

Until this year, Cousin Eleanor had been a conservative in the matter of hotels, when she had yielded to Edith's entreaties to go to one of the "new ones." Hotels, indeed, that revolutionized transient existence. This one, on the Avenue, had a giant in a long blue livery coat who opened their carriage door, and a hall in yellow and black onyx, and maids and valets. After breakfast, when Honora sat down to write to Aunt Mary, she described the suite of rooms in which they lived, — the brass beds, the electric night lamps, the mahogany French furniture, the heavy carpets, and even the white-tiled bathroom. There was a marvellous arrangement in the walls with which Edith was never tired of playing, a circular plate covered with legends of every conceivable want, from a newspaper to a needle and thread and a Scotch whiskey highball.

At breakfast, more stimulants — of a mental nature, of course. Solomon in all his glory had never broken eggs in such a dining room. It had onyx pillars, too, and gilt furniture, and table after table of the whitest napery stretched from one end of it to the other. The glass and silver was all of a special pattern, and an obsequious waiter handed Honora a menu in a silver frame, with a handle. One side of the menu was in English, and the other in French. All around them were well-dressed, well-fed, prosperous-looking people, talking and laughing in subdued tones as they ate. And Honora had a strange feeling of being one of them, of being as rich and prosperous as they, of coming into a long-deferred inheritance.

The mad excitement of that day in New York is a faint memory now, so much has Honora lived since then. We descendants of rigid Puritans, of pioneer tobacco-planters and frontiersmen, take naturally to a luxury such as the world has never seen — as our right. We have abolished kings, in order that as many of us as possible may abide in palaces. In one day Honora forgot the seventeen years spent in the "little house under the hill," as though these had never been. Cousin Eleanor, with a delightful sense of wrong-doing, yielded to the temptation to adorn her; and the saleswomen, who knew Mrs. Hanbury, made indiscreet remarks. Such a figure and such a face, and just enough of height! Two new gowns were ordered, to be tried on at Sutcliffe, and as many hats, and an ulster, and heaven knows what else. Memory fails.

In the evening they went to a new comic opera, and it is the music of that which brings back the day most vividly to Honora's mind.

In the morning they took an early train to Sutcliffe

Manors, on the Hudson. It is an historic place. First of all, after leaving the station, you climb through the little town clinging to the hillside; and Honora was struck by the quaint houses and shops which had been places of barter before the Revolution. The age of things appealed to her. It was a brilliant day at the very end of September, the air sharp, and here and there a creeper had been struck crimson. Beyond the town, on the slopes, were other new sights to stimulate the imagination: country houses — not merely houses in the country, but mansions — enticingly hidden among great trees in a way to whet Honora's curiosity as she pictured to herself the blissful quality of the life which their owners must lead. Long, curving driveways led up to the houses from occasional lodges; and once, as though to complete the impression, a young man and two women, superbly mounted, came trotting out of one of these driveways, talking and laughing gayly. Honora took a good look at the man. He was not handsome, but had, in fact, a distinguished and haunting ugliness. The girls were straight-featured and conventional to the last degree.

Presently they came to the avenue of elms that led up to the long, low buildings of the school.

Little more will be necessary, in the brief account of Honora's life at boarding-school, than to add an humble word of praise on the excellence of Miss Turner's establishment. That lady, needless to say, did not advertise in the magazines, or issue a prospectus. Parents were more or less in the situation of the candidates who desired the honour and privilege of whitewashing Tom Sawyer's fence. If you were a parent, and were allowed to confide your daughter to Miss Turner, instead of demanding a prospectus, you gave thanks to heaven, and spoke about it to your friends.

The life of the young ladies, of course, was regulated on the strictest principles. Early rising, prayers, breakfast, studies; the daily walk, rain or shine, under the watchful convoy of Miss Hood, the girls in columns of twos; tennis on the school court, or skating on the school pond. Cotton Mather himself could not have disapproved of the Sundays, nor of the discourse of the elderly Doctor Moale (which you heard if you were not a Presbyterian), although the reverend gentleman was distinctly Anglican in appearance and manners. Sometimes Honora felt devout, and would follow the service with the utmost attention. Her religion came in waves. On the Sundays when the heathen prevailed she studied the congregation, grew to distinguish the local country families; and, if the truth must be told, watched for several Sundays for that ugly yet handsome young man whom she had seen on horseback. But he never appeared, and presently she forgot him.

Had there been a prospectus (which is ridiculous!), the great secret of Miss Turner's school could not very well have been mentioned in it. The English language, it is to be feared, is not quite flexible enough to mention this secret with delicacy. Did Honora know it? Who can say? Self-respecting young ladies do not talk about such things, and Honora was nothing if not self-respecting.

"SUTCLIFFE MANORS, October 15th.

"DEAREST AUNT MARY: As I wrote you, I continue to miss you and Uncle Tom dreadfully, — and dear old Peter, too; and Cathy and Bridget and Mary Ann. And I hate to get up at seven o'clock. And Miss Hood, who takes us out walking and teaches us composition, is such a ridiculously strict old maid — you would laugh at her. And the Sundays are terrible. Miss Turner makes us read the Bible for a whole hour in the afternoon, and reads to us in the evening. And Uncle Tom was right when he said we should have nothing but jam and bread and butter for supper: oh, yes, and cold meat. I am always ravenously hungry. I count the days until Christmas, when I shall have some really good things to eat again. And of course I cannot wait to see you all.

"I do not mean to give you the impression that I am not happy here, and I never can be thankful enough to dear Cousin Eleanor for sending me. Some of the girls are most attractive. Among others, I have become great friends with Ethel Wing, who is tall and blond and good-looking; and her clothes, though simple, are beautiful. To hear her imitate Miss Turner or Miss Hood or Dr. Moale is almost as much fun as going to the theatre. You must have heard of her father — he is *the* Mr. Wing who owns all the railroads and other things, and they have a house in Newport and another in New York, and a country place and a yacht.

"I like Sarah Wycliffe very much. She was brought up abroad, and we lead the French class together. Her father has a house in Paris, which they only use for a month or so in the year: an hôtel, as the French call it. And then there is Maude Capron, from Philadelphia, whose father is Secretary of War. I have now to go to my class in English composition, but I will write to you again on Saturday.

"Your loving niece,

"HONORA."

The Christmas holidays came, and went by like mileposts from the window of an express train. There was a Glee Club: there were dances, and private theatricals in Mrs. Dwyer's new house, in which it was imperative that Honora should take part. There was no such thing as getting up for breakfast, and once she did not see Uncle Tom for two whole days. He asked her where she was staying. It was the first Christmas she remembered spending without Peter. His present appeared, but perhaps it was fortunate, on the whole, that he was in Texas, trying a case. It seemed almost no time at all before she was at the station again, clinging to Aunt Mary: but now the separation was not so hard, and she had Edith and Mary for company, and George, a dignified and responsible sophomore at Harvard.

Owing to the sudden withdrawal from school of little Louise Simpson, the Cincinnati girl who had shared her room during the first term, Honora had a new room-mate after the holidays, Susan Holt. Susan was not beautiful, but she was good. Her nose turned up, her hair Honora described as a negative colour, and she wore it in defiance of all prevailing modes. If you looked very hard at Susan (which few people ever did), you saw that she had remarkable blue eyes: they were the eyes of a saint. She was neither tall nor short, and her complexion was not all that it might have been. In brief, Susan was one of those girls who go through a whole term at boarding-school without any particular notice from the more brilliant Honoras and Ethel Wings.

In some respects, Susan was an ideal room-mate. She read the Bible every night and morning, and she wrote many letters home. Her ruling passion, next to religion, was order, and she took it upon herself to arrange Honora's bureau drawers. It is needless to say that Honora accepted these ministrations and that she found Susan's admiration an entirely natural sentiment. Susan was self-effacing, and she enjoyed listening to Honora's views on all topics.

Susan, like Peter, was taken for granted. She came from somewhere, and after school was over, she would go somewhere. She lived in New York, Honora knew, and beyond that was not curious. We never know when we are entertaining an angel unawares. One evening, early in May, when she went up to prepare for supper she found Susan sitting in the window reading a letter, and on the floor beside her was a photograph. Honora picked it up. It was the picture of a large country house with many chimneys, taken across a wide green lawn.

"Susan, what's this?"

Susan looked up.

"Oh, it's Silverdale. My brother Joshua took it."

"Silverdale?" repeated Honora.

"It's our place in the country," Susan replied. "The family moved up last week. You see, the trees are just beginning to bud."

Honora was silent a moment, gazing at the picture.

"It's very beautiful, isn't it? You never told me about it."

"Didn't I?" said Susan. "I think of it very often. It has always seemed much more like home to me than our house in New York, and I love it better than any spot I know."

Honora gazed at Susan, who had resumed her reading.

"And you are going there when school is over."

"Oh, yes," said Susan; "I can hardly wait." Suddenly she put down her letter, and looked at Honora.

"And you," she asked, "where are you going?"

"I don't know. Perhaps—perhaps I shall go to the sea for a while with my cousins."

It was foolish, it was wrong. But for the life of her Honora could not say she was going to spend the long hot summer in St. Louis. The thought of it had haunted her for weeks: and sometimes, when the other girls were discussing their plans, she had left them abruptly. And now she was aware that Susan's blue eyes were fixed upon her, and that they had a strange and penetrating quality she had never noticed before: a certain tenderness, an understanding that made Honora redden and turn.

"I wish," said Susan, slowly, "that you would come and stay awhile with me. Your home is so far away, and I don't know when I shall see you again."

"Oh, Susan," she murmured, "it's awfully good of you, but I'm afraid—I couldn't."

She walked to the window, and stood looking out for a moment at the budding trees. Her heart was beating faster, and she was strangely uncomfortable.

"I really don't expect to go to the sea, Susan," she said. "You see, my aunt and uncle are all alone in St. Louis, and I ought to go back to them. If—if my father had lived, it might have been different. He died, and my mother, when I was little more than a year old."

Susan was all sympathy. She slipped her hand into Honora's.

"Where did he live?" she asked.

"Abroad," answered Honora. "He was consul at Nice, and had a villa there when he died. And people said he had an unusually brilliant career before him. My aunt and uncle brought me up, and my cousin, Mrs. Hanbury, Edith's mother, and Mary's, sent me here to school."

Honora breathed easier after this confession, but it was long before sleep came to her that night. She wondered what it would be like to visit at a great country house such as Silverdale, what it would be like to live in one. It seemed a strange and cruel piece of irony on the part of the fates that Susan, instead of Honora, should have been chosen for such a life: Susan, who would have been quite as happy spending her summers in St. Louis, and taking excursions in the electric cars: Susan, who had never experienced that dreadful, vacuum-like feeling, who had no ambitious craving to be satisfied. Mingled with her flushes of affection for Susan was a certain queer feeling of contempt, of which Honora was ashamed.

Nevertheless, in the days that followed, a certain metamorphosis seemed to have taken place in Susan. She was still the same modest, self-effacing, helpful roommate, but in Honora's eyes she had changed — Honora could no longer separate her image from the vision of Silverdale. And, if the naked truth must be told, it was due to Silverdale that Susan owes the honour of her first mention in those descriptive letters from Sutcliffe, which Aunt Mary has kept to this day.

Four days later Susan had a letter from her mother containing an astonishing discovery. There could be no mistake, — Mrs. Holt had brought Honora to this country as a baby.

"Why, Susan," cried Honora, "you must have been the *other* baby."

"But you were the beautiful one," replied Susan, generously. "I have often heard mother tell about it, and how every one on the ship noticed you, and how Hortense cried when your aunt and uncle took you away. And to think we have been rooming together all these months and did not know that we were really — old friends!

And Honora, mother says you must come to Silverdale to pay us a visit when school closes. She wants to see you. I think," added Susan, smiling, "I think she feels responsible for you. She says that you must give me your aunt's address, and that she will write to her."

"Oh, I'd so like to go, Susan. And I don't think Aunt Mary would object — for a little while."

Honora lost no time in writing the letter asking for permission, and it was not until after she had posted it that she felt a sudden, sharp regret as she thought of them in their loneliness. But the postponement of her home-coming would only be for a fortnight at best. And she had seen so little!

In due time Aunt Mary's letter arrived. There was no mention of loneliness in it, only of joy that Honora was to have the opportunity to visit such a place as Silverdale. Aunt Mary, it seems, had seen pictures of it long ago in a magazine of the book club, in an article concerning one of Mrs. Holt's charities — a model home for indiscreet young women. At the end of the year, Aunt Mary added, she had bought the number of the magazine, because of her natural interest in Mrs. Holt on Honora's account. Honora cried a little over that letter, but her determination to go to Silverdale was unshaken.

June came at last, and the end of school. The subject of Miss Turner's annual talk was worldliness. Miss Turner saw signs, she regretted to say, of a lowering in the ideals of American women: of a restlessness, of a desire for what was a false consideration and recognition; for power. Some of her own pupils, alas! were not free from this fault. Ethel Wing, who was next to Honora, nudged her and laughed, and passed her some of Maillard's chocolates, which she had in her pocket. Woman's place, continued Miss Turner, was the home, and she hoped they would all make good wives. She had done her best to prepare them to be such. Independence, they would find, was only relative: no one had it completely. And she hoped that none of her scholars would ever descend to that base competition to outdo one's neighbours, so characteristic of the country to-day.

The friends, and even the enemies, were kissed good-by, with pledges of eternal friendship. Cousin Eleanor Hanbury came for Edith and Mary, and hoped Honora would enjoy herself at Silverdale. Dear Cousin Eleanor! Her heart was large, and her charity unpretentious. She slipped into Honora's fingers, as she embraced her, a silver purse with some gold coins in it, and bade her not to forget to write home very often.

"You know what pleasure it will give them, my dear," she said, as she stepped on the train for New York.

"And I am going home soon, Cousin Eleanor," replied Honora, with a little touch of homesickness in her voice.

"I know, dear," said Mrs. Hanbury. But there was a peculiar, almost wistful expression on her face as she kissed Honora again, as of one who assents to a fiction in order to humour a child.

As the train pulled out, Ethel Wing waved to her from the midst of a group of girls on the wide rear platform of the last car. It was Mr. Wing's private car, and was going to Newport.

"Be good, Honora!" she cried.

CHAPTER VII

THE OLYMPIAN ORDER

LYING back in the chair of the Pullman and gazing over the wide Hudson shining in the afternoon sun, Honora's imagination ran riot until the seeming possibilities of life became infinite. At every click of the rails she was drawing nearer to that great world of which she had dreamed, a world of country houses inhabited by an Olympian order. To be sure, Susan, who sat reading in the chair behind her, was but a humble representative of that order — but Providence sometimes makes use of such instruments. The picture of the tall and brilliant Ethel Wing standing behind the brass rail of the platform of the car was continually recurring to Honora as emblematic: of Ethel, in a blue tailor-made gown trimmed with buff braid, and which fitted her slender figure with military exactness. Her hair, the colour of the yellowest of gold, in the manner of its finish seemed somehow to give the impression of that metal; and the militant effect of the costume had been heightened by a small colonial cocked hat. If the truth be told, Honora had secretly idealized Miss Wing, and had found her insouciance, frankness, and tendency to ridicule delightful. Militant — that was indeed Ethel's note — militant and positive.

"You're not going home with Susan!" she had exclaimed, making a little face when Honora had told her. "They say that Silverdale is as slow as a nunnery — and you're on your knees all the time. You ought to have come to Newport with me."

It was characteristic of Miss Wing that she seemed to have taken no account of the fact that she had neglected to issue this alluring invitation. Life at Silverdale slow! How could it be slow amidst such beauty and magnificence?

The train was stopping at a new little station on which hung the legend, in gold letters, "Sutton." The sun was well on his journey towards the western hills. Susan had touched her on the shoulder.

"Here we are, Honora," she said, and added, with an unusual tremor in her voice, "at last!"

On the far side of the platform a yellow, two-seated wagon was waiting, and away they drove through the village, with its old houses and its sleepy streets and its orchards, and its ancient tavern dating from stage-coach days. Just outside of it, on the tree-dotted slope of a long hill, was a modern brick building, exceedingly practical in appearance, surrounded by spacious grounds enclosed in a paling fence. That, Susan said, was the Sutton Home.

"Your mother's charity?"

A light came into the girl's eyes.

"So you have heard of it? Yes, it is the thing that interests mother more than anything else in the world."

"Oh," said Honora, "I hope she will let me go through it."

"I'm sure she will want to take you there to-morrow," answered Susan, and she smiled.

The road wound upwards, by the valley of a brook, through the hills, now wooded, now spread with pastures that shone golden green in the evening light, the herds gathering at the gate-bars. Presently they came to a gothic-looking stone building, with a mediæval bridge thrown across the stream in front of it, and massive gates flung open. As they passed, Honora had a glimpse of a blue driveway under the arch of the forest. An elderly woman looked out at them through the open half of a leaded lattice.

"That's the Chamberlin estate," Susan volunteered. "Mr. Chamberlin has built a castle on the top of that hill."

Honora caught her breath.

"Are many of the places here like that?" she asked. Susan laughed.

"Some people don't think the place is very — appropriate," she contented herself with replying.

A little later, as they climbed higher, other houses could be discerned dotted about the country-side, nearly all of them varied expressions of the passion for a new architecture which seemed to possess the rich. Most of them were in conspicuous positions, and surrounded by wide acres. Each, to Honora, was an inspiration.

"I had no idea there were so many people here," she said.

"I'm afraid Sutton is becoming fashionable," answered Susan.

"And don't you want it to?" asked Honora.

"It was very nice before," said Susan, quietly.

Honora was silent. They turned in between two simple stone pillars that divided a low wall, overhung from the inside by shrubbery growing under the forest. Susan seized her friend's hand and pressed it.

"I'm always so glad to get back here," she whispered. "I hope you'll like it."

Honora returned the pressure.

The grey road forked, and forked again. Suddenly the forest came to an end in a sort of premeditated tangle of wild garden, and across a wide lawn the great house loomed against the western sky. Its architecture was of the '60's and '70's, with a wide porte-cochère that sheltered the high entrance doors. These were both flung open, a butler and two footmen were standing impassively beside them, and a neat maid within. Honora climbed the steps as in a dream, followed Susan through a hall with a black-walnut, fretted staircase, and where she caught a glimpse of two huge Chinese vases, to a porch on the other side of the house spread with wicker chairs and tables. Out of a group of people at the farther end of this porch arose an elderly lady, who came forward and clasped Susan in her arms.

"And is this Honora? How do you do, my dear? I had the pleasure of knowing you when you were much younger."

Honora, too, was gathered to that ample bosom. Released, she beheld a lady in a mauve satin gown, at the throat of which a cameo brooch was fastened. Mrs. Holt's face left no room for conjecture as to the character of its possessor. Her hair, of a silvering blend, parted in the middle, fitted tightly to her head. She wore earrings. In short, her appearance was in every way suggestive of momentum, of a force which the wise would respect.

"Where are you, Joshua?" she said. "This is the baby we brought from Nice. Come and tell me whether you would recognize her."

Mr. Holt released his daughter. He had a mild blue eye, white mutton-chop whiskers, and very thin hands, and his tweed suit was decidedly the worse for wear.

"I can't say that I should, Elvira," he replied; "although it is not hard to believe that such a beautiful baby should prove to be such a — er — good-looking young woman."

"I've always felt very grateful to you for bringing me back," said Honora.

"Tut, tut, child," said Mrs. Holt; "there was no one else to do it. And be careful how you pay young women compliments, Joshua. They grow vain enough. By the way, my dear, what ever became of your maternal grandfather, old Mr. Allison — wasn't that his name?"

"He died when I was very young," replied Honora.

"He was too fond of the good things of this life," said Mrs. Holt.

"My dear Elvira!" her husband protested.

"I can't help it, he was," retorted that lady. "I am a judge of human nature, and I was relieved, I can tell you, my dear" (to Honora), "when I saw your uncle and aunt on the wharf that morning. I knew that I had confided you to good hands."

"They have done everything for me, Mrs. Holt," said Honora.

The good lady patted her approvingly on the shoulder.

"I'm sure of it, my dear," she said. "And I am glad to see you appreciate it. And now you must renew your acquaintance with the family."

A sister and a brother, Honora had already learned from Susan, had died since she had crossed the ocean with them. Robert and Joshua, Junior, remained. Both were heavy-set, with rather stern faces, both had close-cropped, tan-coloured mustaches and wide jaws, with blue eyes like Susan's. Both were, with women at least, what the French would call difficult — Robert less so than Joshua. They greeted Honora reservedly and — she could not help feeling — a little suspiciously. And their appearance was something of a shock to her; they did not, somehow, "go with the house," and they dressed even more carelessly than Peter Erwin. This was particularly true of Joshua, whose low, turned-down collar revealed a porous, brick-red, and extremely virile neck, and whose clothes were creased at the knees and across the back.

As for their wives, Mrs. Joshua was a merry, brown-eyed little lady already inclining to stoutness, and Honora felt at home with her at once. Mrs. Robert was tall and thin, with an olive face and dark eyes which gave the impression of an uncomfortable penetration. She was dressed simply in a shirtwaist and a dark skirt, but Honora thought her striking looking.

The grandchildren, playing on and off the porch, seemed legion, and they were besieging Susan. In reality there were seven of them, of all sizes and sexes, from the third Joshua with a tennis-bat to the youngest who was weeping at being sent to bed, and holding on to her Aunt Susan with desperation. When Honora had greeted them all, and kissed some of them, she was informed that there were two more upstairs, safely tucked away in cribs.

"I'm sure you love children, don't you?" said Mrs. Joshua. She spoke impulsively, and yet with a kind of childlike shyness.

"I adore them," exclaimed Honora.

A trellised arbour (which some years later would have been called a pergola) led from the porch up the hill to an old-fashioned summer-house on the crest. And thither, presently, Susan led Honora for a view of the distant western hills silhouetted in black against a flaming western sky, before escorting her to her room. The vastness of the house, the width of the staircase, and the size of the second-story hall impressed our heroine.

"I'll send a maid to you later, dear," Susan said. "If you care to lie down for half an hour, no one will disturb you. And I hope you will be comfortable."

Comfortable! When the door had closed, Honora glanced around her and sighed, "comfort" seemed such a strangely inadequate word. She was reminded of the illustrations she had seen of English country houses. The bed alone would almost have filled her little room at home. On the farther side, in an alcove, was a huge dressing-table; a fire was laid in the grate of the marble mantel, the curtains in the bay window were tightly drawn, and near by was a lounge with a reading-light. A huge mahogany wardrobe occupied one corner; in another stood a pier glass, and in another, near the lounge, was a small bookcase filled with books. Honora looked over them curiously. "Robert Elsmere" and a life of Christ, "Mr. Isaacs," a book of sermons by an eminent clergyman, "Innocents Abroad," Hare's "Walks in Rome," "When a Man's Single," by Barrie, a book of meditations, and "Organized Charities for Women."

Adjoining the bedroom was a bathroom in proportion, — evidently all her own, — with a huge porcelain tub and a table set with toilet bottles containing liquids of various colours.

Dreamily, Honora slipped on the new dressing-gown Aunt Mary had made for her, and took a book out of the bookcase. It was the volume of sermons. But she could not read: she was forever looking about the room, and thinking of the family she had met downstairs. Of course, when one lived in a house like this, one could afford to dress and act as one liked. She was aroused from her reflections by the soft but penetrating notes of a Japanese gong, followed by a gentle knock on the door and the entrance of an elderly maid, who informed her it was time to dress for dinner.

"If you'll excuse me, Miss," said that hitherto silent individual when the operation was completed, "you do look lovely."

Honora, secretly, was of that opinion too as she surveyed herself in the long glass. The simple summer silk, of a deep and glowing pink, rivalled the colour in her cheeks, and contrasted with the dark and shining masses of her hair; and on her neck glistened a little pendant of her mother's jewels, which Aunt Mary, with Cousin Eleanor's assistance, had had set in New York. Honora's figure was that of a woman of five and twenty: her neck was a slender column, her head well set, and the look of race, which had been hers since childhood, was at nineteen more accentuated. All this she saw, and went down the stairs in a kind of exultation. And when on the threshold of the drawing-room she paused, the conversation suddenly ceased. Mr. Holt and his sons got up somewhat precipitately, and Mrs. Holt came forward to meet her.

"I hope you weren't waiting for me," said Honora, timidly.

"No indeed, my dear," said Mrs. Holt. Tucking Honora's hand under her arm, she led the way majestically to the dining-room, a large apartment with a dimly lighted conservatory at the farther end, presided over by the decorous butler and his assistants. A huge chandelier with prisms hung over the flowers at the centre of the table, which sparkled with glass and silver, while dishes of vermilion and yellow fruits relieved the whiteness of the cloth. Honora found herself beside Mr. Holt, who looked more shrivelled than ever in his evening clothes. And she was about to address him when, with a movement as though to forestall her, he leaned forward convulsively and began a mumbling grace.

The dinner itself was more like a ceremony than a meal, and as it proceeded, Honora found it increasingly difficult to rid herself of a curious feeling of being on probation.

Joshua, who sat on her other side and ate prodigiously, scarcely addressed a word to her; but she gathered from his remarks to his father and brother that he was interested in cows. And Mr. Holt was almost exclusively occupied in slowly masticating the special dishes which the butler impressively laid before him. He asked her a few questions about Miss Turner's school, but it was not until she had admired the mass of peonies in the centre of the table that his eyes brightened, and he smiled.

"You like flowers?" he asked.

"I love them," said Honora.

"I am the gardener here," he said. "You must see my garden, Miss Leffingwell. I am in it by half-past six every morning, rain or shine."

Honora looked up, and surprised Mrs. Robert's eyes fixed on her with the same strange expression she had noticed on her arrival. And for some senseless reason, she flushed.

The conversation was chiefly carried on by kindly little Mrs. Joshua and by Mrs. Holt, who seemed at once to preside and to dominate. She praised Honora's gown, but left a lingering impression that she thought her overdressed, without definitely saying so. And she made innumerable — and often embarrassing — inquiries about Honora's aunt and uncle, and her life in St. Louis, and her friends there, and how she had happened to go to Sutcliffe to school. Sometimes Honora blushed, but she answered them all good-naturedly. And when at length the meal had marched sedately down to the fruit, Mrs. Holt rose and drew Honora out of the dining room.

"It is a little hard on you, my dear," she said, "to give you so much family on your arrival. But there are some other people coming to-morrow, when it will be gayer, I hope, for you and Susan."

"It is so good of you and Susan to want me, Mrs. Holt," replied Honora, "I am enjoying it so much. I have never been in a big country house like this, and I am glad there is no one else here. I have heard my aunt speak of you so often, and tell how kind you were to take charge of me, that I have always hoped to know you sometime or other. And it seems the strangest of coincidences that I should have roomed with Susan at Sutcliffe."

"Susan has grown very fond of you," said Mrs. Holt, graciously. "We are very glad to have you, my dear, and I must own that I had a curiosity to see you again. Your aunt struck me as a good and sensible woman, and it was a positive relief to know that you were to be confided to her care." Mrs. Holt, however, shook her head and regarded Honora, and her next remark might have been taken as a clew to her thoughts. "But we are not very gay at Silverdale, Honora."

Honora's quick intuition detected the implication of a frivolity which even her sensible aunt had not been able to eradicate.

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she cried, "I shall be so happy here, just seeing things and being among you. And I am so interested in the little bit I have seen already. I caught a glimpse of your girls' home on my way from the station. I hope you will take me there."

Mrs. Holt gave her a quick look, but beheld in Honora's clear eyes only eagerness and ingenuousness.

The change in the elderly lady's own expression, and incidentally in the atmosphere which enveloped her, was remarkable.

"Would you really like to go, my dear?"

"Oh, yes indeed," cried Honora. "You see, I have heard so much of it, and I should like to write my aunt about it. She is interested in the work you are doing, and she has kept a magazine with an article in it, and a picture of the institution."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the lady, now visibly pleased. "It is a very modest little work, my dear. I had no idea that — out in St. Louis — that the beams of my little candle had carried so far. Indeed you shall see it, Honora. We will go down the first thing in the morning."

Mrs. Robert, who had been sitting on the other side of the room, rose abruptly and came towards them. There was something very like a smile on her face, — although it wasn't really a smile — as she bent over and kissed her mother-in-law on the cheek.

"I am glad to hear you are interested in — charities, Miss Leffingwell," she said.

Honora's face grew warm.

"I have not so far had very much to do with them, I am afraid," she answered.

"How should she?" demanded Mrs. Holt. "Gwendolen, you're not going up already?"

"I have some letters to write," said Mrs. Robert.

"Gwen has helped me immeasurably," said Mrs. Holt, looking after the tall figure of her daughter-in-law, "but she has a curious, reserved character. You have to know her, my dear. She is not at all like Susan, for instance."

Honora awoke the next morning to a melody, and lay for some minutes in a delicious semi-consciousness, wondering where she was. Presently she discovered that the notes were those of a bird on a tree immediately outside of her window — a tree of wonderful perfection, the lower branches of which swept the ground. Other symmetrical trees, of many varieties, dotted a velvet lawn, which formed a great natural terrace above the forested valley of Silver Brook. On the grass, dew-drenched cobwebs gleamed in the early sun, and the breeze that stirred the curtains was charged with the damp, fresh odours of the morning. Voices caught her ear, and two figures appeared in the distance. One she recognized as Mr. Holt, and the other was evidently a gardener. The gilt clock on the mantel pointed to a quarter of seven.

It is far too late in this history to pretend that Honora was, by preference, an early riser, and therefore it must have been the excitement caused by her surroundings that made her bathe and dress with alacrity that morning. A housemaid was dusting the stairs as she descended into the empty hall. She crossed the lawn, took a path through the trees that bordered it, and came suddenly upon an old-fashioned garden in all the freshness of its early morning colour. In one of the winding paths she stopped with a little exclamation. Mr. Holt rose from his knees in front of her, where he had been digging industriously with a trowel. His greeting, when contrasted with his comparative taciturnity at dinner the night before, was almost effusive — and a little pathetic.

"My dear young lady," he exclaimed, "up so early?" He held up forbiddingly a mould-covered palm. "I can't shake hands with you."

Honora laughed.

"I couldn't resist the temptation to see your garden," she said.

A gentle light gleamed in his blue eyes, and he paused before a trellis of June roses. With his gardening knife he cut three of them, and held them gallantly against her white gown. Her sensitive colour responded as she thanked him, and she pinned them deftly at her waist.

"You like gardens?" he said.

"I was brought up with them," she answered; "I mean," she corrected herself swiftly, "in a very modest way. My uncle is passionately fond of flowers, and he makes our little yard bloom with them all summer. But of course," Honora added, "I've never seen anything like this."

"It has been a life work," answered Mr. Holt, proudly, "and yet I feel as though I had not yet begun. Come, I will show you the peonies — they are at their best — before I go in and make myself respectable for breakfast."

Ten minutes later, as they approached the house in amicable and even lively conversation, they beheld Susan and Mrs. Robert standing on the steps under the porte-cochère, watching them.

"Why, Honora," cried Susan, "how energetic you are! I actually had a shock when I went to your room and found you'd gone. I'll have to write Miss Turner."

"Don't," pleaded Honora; "you see, I had every inducement to get up."

"She has been well occupied," put in Mr. Holt. "She has been admiring my garden."

"Indeed I have," said Honora.

"Oh, then, you have won father's heart!" cried Susan. Gwendolen Holt smiled. Her eyes were fixed upon the roses in Honora's belt.

"Good morning, Miss Leffingwell," she said, simply.

Mr. Holt having removed the loam from his hands, the whole family, excepting Joshua, Junior, and including an indefinite number of children, and Carroll, the dignified butler, and Martha, the elderly maid, trooped into the library for prayers. Mr. Holt sat down before a teak-wood table at the end of the room, on which reposed a great, morocco-covered Bible. Adjusting his spectacles, he read, in a mild but impressive voice, a chapter of Matthew, while Mrs. Joshua tried to quiet her youngest. Honora sat staring at a figure on the carpet, uncomfortably aware that Mrs. Robert was still studying her. Mr. Holt closed the Bible reverently, and announced a prayer, whereupon the family knelt upon the floor and leaned their elbows on the seats of their chairs. Honora did likewise, wondering at the facility with which Mr. Holt worded his appeal, and at the number of things he found to pray for. Her knees had begun to ache before he had finished.

At breakfast such a cheerful spirit prevailed that Honora began almost to feel at home. Even Robert indulged occasionally in raillery.

"Where in the world is Josh?" asked Mrs. Holt, after they were seated.

"I forgot to tell you, mother," little Mrs. Joshua chirped up, "that he got up at an unearthly hour, and went over to Grafton to look at a cow."

"A cow!" sighed Mrs. Holt. "Oh, dear, I might have known it. You must understand, Honora, that every member of the Holt family has a hobby. Joshua's is Jerseys."

"I'm sure I should adore them if I lived in the country," Honora declared.

"If you and Joshua would only take that Sylvester farm, and build a house, Annie," said Mr. Holt, munching the dried bread which was specially prepared for him, "I should be completely happy. Then," he added, turning to Honora, "I should have both my sons settled on the place. Robert and Gwen are sensible in building."

"It's cheaper to live with you, granddad," laughed Mrs. Joshua. "Josh says if we do that, he has more money to buy cows."

At this moment a footman entered, and presented Mrs. Holt with some mail on a silver tray.

"The Vicomte de Toqueville is coming this afternoon, Joshua," she announced, reading rapidly from a sheet on which was visible a large crown. "He landed in New York last week, and writes to know if I could have him."

"Another of mother's menagerie," remarked Robert.

"I don't think that's nice of you, Robert," said his mother. "The Vicomte was very kind to your father and me in Paris, and invited us to his château in Provence."

Robert was sceptical.

"Are you sure he had one?" he insisted.

Even Mr. Holt laughed.

"Robert," said his mother, "I wish Gwen could induce you to travel more. Perhaps you would learn that all foreigners aren't fortune-hunters."

"I've had an opportunity to observe the ones who come over here, mother."

"I won't have a prospective guest discussed," Mrs. Holt declared, with finality. "Joshua, you remember my telling you last spring that Martha Spence's son called on me?" she asked. "He is in business with a man named Dallam, I believe, and making a great deal of money for a young man. He is just a year younger than you, Robert."

"Do you mean that fat, tow-headed boy that used to come up here and eat melons and ride my pony?" inquired Robert. "Howard Spence?"

Mrs. Holt smiled.

"He isn't fat any longer, Robert. Indeed, he's quite good-looking. Since his mother died, I had lost trace of him. But I found a photograph of hers when I was clearing up my desk some months ago, and sent it to him, and he came to thank me. I forgot to tell you that I invited him for a fortnight any time he chose, and he has just written to ask if he may come now. I regret to say that he's on the Stock Exchange — but I was very fond of his mother. It doesn't seem to me quite a legitimate business."

"Why!" exclaimed little Mrs. Joshua, unexpectedly, "I'm given to understand that the Stock Exchange is quite aristocratic in these days."

"I'm afraid I am old-fashioned, my dear," said Mrs. Holt, rising. "It has always seemed to me little better than a gambling place. Honora, if you still wish to go to the Girls' Home, I have ordered the carriage in a quarter of an hour."

CHAPTER VIII

A CHAPTER OF CONQUESTS

Honora's interest in the Institution was so lively, and she asked so many questions and praised so highly the work with which the indiscreet young women were occupied that Mrs. Holt patted her hand as they drove homeward.

"My dear," she said, "I begin to wish I'd adopted you myself. Perhaps, later on, we can find a husband for you, and you will marry and settle down near us here at Silverdale, and then you can help me with the work."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she replied, "I should so like to — help you, I mean. And it would be wonderful to live in such a place. And as for marriage, it seems such a long way off that somehow I never think of it."

"Naturally," ejaculated Mrs. Holt, with approval, "a young girl of your age should not. But, my dear, I am afraid you are destined to have many admirers. If you had not been so well brought up, and were not naturally so sensible, I should fear for you."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt!" exclaimed Honora, deprecatingly, and blushing very prettily.

"Whatever else I am," said Mrs. Holt, vigorously, "I am not a flatterer. I am telling you something for your own good — which you probably know already."

Honora was discreetly silent. She thought of the proud and unsusceptible George Hanbury, whom she had cast down from the tower of his sophomore dignity with such apparent ease; and of certain gentlemen at home, young and middle-aged, who had behaved foolishly during the Christmas holidays.

At lunch both the Roberts and the Joshuas were away.

Afterwards they romped with the children—she and Susan. They were shy at first, especially the third Joshua, but Honora captivated him by playing two sets of tennis in the broiling sun, at the end of which exercise he regarded her with a new-born admiration in his eyes. He was thirteen.

"I didn't think you were that kind at all," he said.

"What kind did you think I was?" asked Honora, passing her arm around his shoulder as they walked towards the house.

The boy grew scarlet.

"Oh, I didn't think you—you could play tennis," he stammered.

Honora stopped, and seized his chin and tilted his face upward.

"Now, Joshua," she said, "look at me and say that over again."

"Well," he replied desperately, "I thought you wouldn't want to get all mussed up and hot."

"That's better," said Honora. "You thought I was vain, didn't you?"

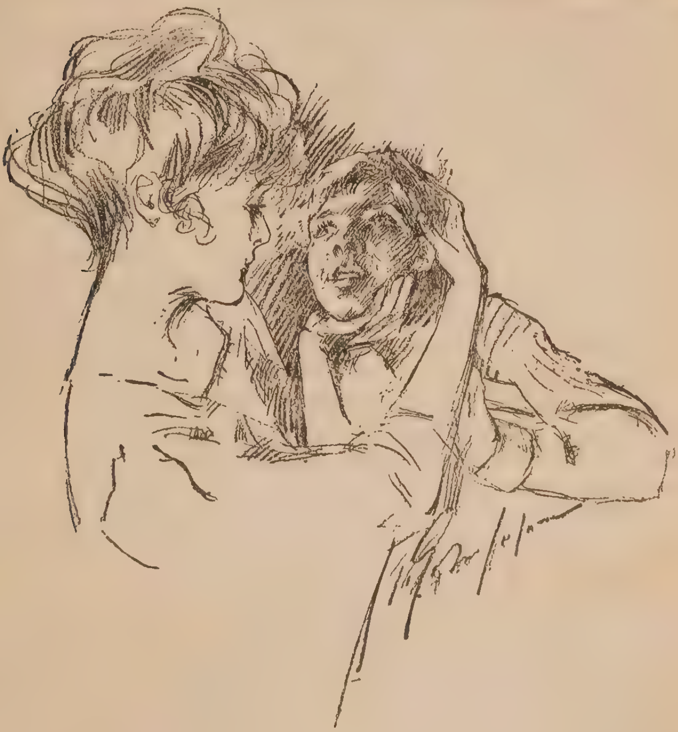
"But I don't think so any more," he avowed passionately. "I think you're a trump. And we'll play again to-morrow, won't we?"

"We'll play any day you like," she declared.

It is unfair to suppose that the arrival of a real vicomte and of a young, good-looking, and successful member of the New York Stock Exchange were responsible for Honora's appearance, an hour later, in the embroidered linen gown which Cousin Eleanor had given her that spring. Tea was already in progress on the porch, and if a hush in the conversation and the scraping of chairs is any sign of a sensation, this happened when our heroine appeared in the doorway. And Mrs. Holt, in the act of lifting the hot-water kettle, put it down again. Whether or not there was approval in the lady's delft-blue eye, Honora could not have said. The Vicomte, with the graceful facility of his race, had differentiated himself from the group and stood before her. As soon as the words of introduction were pronounced, he made a bow that was a tribute in itself, exaggerated in its respect.

"It is a pleasure, Mademoiselle," he murmured, but his eyes were more eloquent.

A description of him in his own language leaped into Honora's mind, so much did he appear to have walked out of one of the many yellow-backed novels she had read. He was not tall, but beautifully made, and his coat was quite absurdly cut in at the waist; his mustache was en-croc, and its points resembled those of the Spanish bayonets in the conservatory: he might have been three and thirty, and he was what the novels described as un peu fané—



which means that he had seen the world: his eyes were extraordinarily bright, black, and impenetrable.

A greater contrast to the Vicomte than Mr. Howard Spence would have been difficult to find. He was Honora's first glimpse of Finance, of the powers that travelled in private cars and despatched ships across the ocean. And in our modern mythology, he might have stood for the god of Prosperity. Prosperity is pink, and so was Mr. Spence, in two places, — his smooth-shaven cheeks and his shirt. His flesh had a certain firmness, but he was not stout; he was merely well fed, as Prosperity should be. His features were comparatively regular, his mustache a light brown, his eyes hazel. The fact that he came from that mysterious metropolis, the heart of which is Wall Street, not only excused but legitimized the pink shirt and the neatly knotted green tie, the pepper-and-salt check suit that was loose and at the same time well-fitting, and the jewelled ring on his plump little finger. On the whole, Mr. Spence was not only prepossessing, but he contrived to give Honora, as she shook his hand, the impression of being brought a step nearer to the national source of power. Unlike the Vicomte, he did not appear to have been instantly and mortally wounded upon her arrival on the scene, but his greeting was flattering, and he remained by her side instead of returning to that of Mrs. Robert.

"When did you come up?" he asked.

"Only yesterday," answered Honora.

"New York," said Mr. Spence, producing a gold cigarette case on which his monogram was largely and somewhat elaborately engraved, "New York is played out this time of year—isn't it? I dropped in at Sherry's last night for dinner, and there weren't thirty people there."

Honora had heard of Sherry's as a restaurant where one dined fabulously, and she tried to imagine the cosmopolitan and blissful existence which permitted "dropping in at" such a place. Moreover, Mr. Spence was plainly under the impression that she too "came up" from New York, and it was impossible not to be a little pleased.

"It must be a relief to get into the country," she ventured.

Mr. Spence glanced around him expressively, and then looked at her with a slight smile. The action and the smile—to which she could not refrain from responding—seemed to establish a tacit understanding between them. It was natural that he should look upon Silverdale as a slow place, and there was something delicious in his taking for granted that she shared this opinion. She wondered a little wickedly what he would say when he knew the truth about her, and this was the birth of a resolution that his interest should not flag.

"Oh, I can stand the country when it is properly inhabited," he said, and their eyes met in laughter.

"How many inhabitants do you require?" she asked.

"Well," he said brazenly, "the right kind of inhabitant is worth a thousand of the wrong kind. It is a good rule in business, when you come across a gilt-edged security, to make a specialty of it."

Honora found the compliment somewhat singular. But she was prepared to forgive New York a few sins in the matter of commercial slang: New York, which evidently dressed as it liked, and talked as it liked. But not knowing any more of a gilt-edged security than that it was something to Mr. Spence's taste, a retort was out of the question. Then, as though she were doomed that day to complicity, her eyes chanced to encounter an appealing glance from the Vicomte, who was searching with the courage of despair for an English word, which his hostess awaited in stoical silence. He was trying to give his impressions of Silverdale, in comparison to country places abroad, while Mrs. Robert regarded him enigmatically, and Susan sympathetically. Honora had an almost irresistible desire to laugh.

"Ah, Madame," he cried, still looking at Honora, "will you have the kindness to permit me to walk about ever so little?"

"Certainly, Vicomte, and I will go with you. Get my parasol, Susan. Perhaps you would like to come, too, Howard," she added to Mr. Spence; "it has been so long since you were here, and we have made many changes."

"And you, Mademoiselle," said the Vicomte to Honora, "you will come — yes? You are interested in landscape?"

"I love the country," said Honora.

"It is a pleasure to have a guest who is so appreciative," said Mrs. Holt. "Miss Leffingwell was up at seven this morning, and in the garden with my husband."

"At seven!" exclaimed the Vicomte; "you American young ladies are wonderful. For example —" and he was about to approach her to enlarge on this congenial theme when Susan arrived with the parasol, which Mrs. Holt put in his hands.

"We'll begin, I think, with the view from the summer house," she said. "And I will show you how our famous American landscape architect, Mr. Olmstead, has treated the slope."

There was something humorous, and a little pathetic in the contrasted figures of the Vicomte and their hostess crossing the lawn in front of them. Mr. Spence paused a moment to light his cigarette, and he seemed to derive infinite pleasure from this juxtaposition.

"Got left, — didn't he?" he said.

To this observation there was, obviously, no answer.

"I'm not very strong on foreigners," he declared. "An American is good enough for me. And there's something about that fellow which would make me a little slow in trusting him with a woman I cared for."

"If you are beginning to worry over Mrs. Holt," said Honora, "we'd better walk a little faster."

Mr. Spence's delight at this sally was so unrestrained as to cause the couple ahead to turn. The Vicomte's expression was reproachful.

"Where's Susan?" asked Mrs. Holt.

"I think she must have gone in the house," Honora answered.

"You two seem to be having a very good time."

"Oh, we're hitting it off fairly well," said Mr. Spence, no doubt for the benefit of the Vicomte. And he added in a confidential tone, "Aren't we?"

"Not on the subject of the Vicomte," she replied promptly. "I like him. I like French people."

"What!" he exclaimed, halting in his steps, "you don't take that man seriously?"

"I haven't known him long enough to take him seriously," said Honora.

"There's a blindness about women," he declared, "that's incomprehensible. They'll invest in almost any old thing if the certificates are beautifully engraved. If you were a man, you wouldn't trust that Frenchman to give you change for five dollars."

"French people," proclaimed Honora, "have a light touch of which we Americans are incapable. We do not know how to relax."

"A light touch!" cried Mr. Spence, delightedly, "that about describes the Vicomte."

"I'm sure you do him an injustice," said Honora.

"We'll see," said Mr. Spence. "Mrs. Holt is always picking up queer people like that. She's noted for it." He turned to her. "How did you happen to come here?"

"I came with Susan," she replied, amusedly, "from boarding-school at Sutcliffe."

"From boarding-school!"

She rather enjoyed his surprise.

"You don't mean to say you are Susan's age?"

"How old did you think I was?" she asked.

"Older than Susan," he said surveying her.

"No, I'm a mere child, I'm nineteen."

"But I thought —" he began, and paused and lighted another cigarette.

Her eyes lighted mischievously.

"You thought that I had been out several years, and that I'd seen a good deal of the world, and that I lived in New York, and that it was strange you didn't know me. But New York is such an enormous place I suppose one can't know everybody there."

"And—where do you come from, if I may ask?" he said.

"St. Louis. I was brought to this country before I was two years old, from France. Mrs. Holt brought me. And I have never been out of St. Louis since, except to go to Sutcliffe. There you have my history. Mrs. Holt would probably have told it to you, if I hadn't."

"And Mrs. Holt brought you to this country?"

Honora explained, not without a certain enjoyment.

"And how do *you* happen to be here?" she demanded. "Are you a member of—of the menagerie?"

He had the habit of throwing back his head when he laughed. This, of course, was a thing to laugh over, and now he deemed it audacity. Five minutes before he might have given it another name. There is no use in saying that the recital of Honora's biography had not made a difference with Mr. Howard Spence, and that he was not a little mortified at his mistake. What he had supposed her to be must remain a matter of conjecture. He was, however, by no means aware how thoroughly this unknown and inexperienced young woman had read his thoughts in her regard. And, if the truth be told, he was on the whole relieved that she was nobody. He was just an ordinary man, provided with no sixth sense or premonitory small voice to warn him that masculine creatures are often in real danger at the moment when they feel most secure.

It is certain that his manner changed, and during the rest of the walk she listened demurely when he talked about Wall Street, with casual references to the powers that be. It was evident that Mr. Howard Spence was one who had his fingers on the pulse of affairs. Ambition leaped in him.

They reached the house in advance of Mrs. Holt and the Vicomte, and Honora went to her room.

At dinner, save for a little matter of a casual remark when Mr. Holt had assumed the curved attitude in which he asked grace, Mr. Spence had a veritable triumph. Self-confidence was a quality which Honora admired. He was undaunted by Mrs. Holt, and advised Mrs. Robert, if she had any pin-money, to buy New York Central; and he predicted an era of prosperity which would be unexampled in the annals of the country. Among other powers, he quoted the father of Honora's schoolmate, Mr. James Wing, as authority for this prophecy. He sat next to Susan, who maintained her usual maidenly silence, but Honora, from time to time, and as though by accident, caught his eye. Even Mr. Holt, when not munching his dried bread, was tempted to make some inquiries about the market.

"So far as I am concerned," Mrs. Holt announced suddenly, "nothing can convince me that it is not gambling."

"My dear Elvira!" protested Mr. Holt.

"I can't help it," said that lady, stoutly; "I'm old-fashioned, I suppose. But it seems to me like legalized gambling."

Mr. Spence took this somewhat severe arraignment of his career in admirable good nature. And if there be such a thing as an implied wink, Honora received one as he proceeded to explain what he was pleased to call the bona-fide nature of the transactions of Dallam and Spence. A discussion ensued in which, to her surprise, even the ordinarily taciturn Joshua took a part, and maintained that the buying and selling of blooded stock was equally gambling. To this his father laughingly agreed. The Vicomte, who sat on Mrs. Holt's right, and who apparently was determined not to suffer a total eclipse without a struggle, gallantly and unexpectedly came to his hostess' rescue, though she treated him as a doubtful ally. This was because he declared with engaging frankness that in France the young men of his monde had a jeunesse: he, who spoke to them, had gambled; everybody gambled in France, where it was regarded as an innocent amusement. He had friends on the Bourse, and he could see no difference in principle between betting on the red at Monte Carlo and the rise and fall of the shares of la Compagnie des Métaux, for example. After completing his argument, he glanced triumphantly about the table, until his restless black eyes encountered Honora's, seemingly seeking a verdict. She smiled impartially.

The subject of finance lasted through the dinner, and the Vicomte proclaimed himself amazed with the evidences of wealth which confronted him on every side in this marvellous country. And once, when he was at a loss for a word, Honora astonished and enchanted him by supplying it.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he exclaimed, "I was sure when I first beheld you that you spoke my language! And with such an accent!"

"I have studied it all my life, Vicomte," she said, modestly, "and I had the honour to be born in your country. I have always wished to see it again."

Monsieur de Toqueville ventured the fervent hope that her wish might soon be gratified, but not before he returned to France. He expressed himself in French, and in a few moments she found herself deep in a discussion with him in that tongue. While she talked, her veins seemed filled with fire; and she was dimly and automatically aware of the disturbance about her, as though she were creating a magnetic storm that interfered with all other communication. Mr. Holt's nightly bezique, which he played with Susan, did not seem to be going as well as usual, and elsewhere conversation was a palpable pretence. Mr. Spence, who was attempting to entertain the two daughters-in-law, was clearly distrait — if his glances meant anything. Robert and Joshua had not appeared, and Mrs. Holt, at the far end of the room under the lamp, regarded Honora from time to time over the edge of the evening newspaper.

In his capacity as a student of American manners, an unsuspected if scattered knowledge on Honora's part of that portion of French literature included between Théophile Gautier and Gyp at once dumfounded and delighted the Vicomte de Toqueville. And he was curious to know whether, amongst American young ladies, Miss Leffingwell was the exception or the rule. Those eyes of his, which had paid to his hostess a tender respect, snapped when they spoke to our heroine, and presently he boldly abandoned literature to declare that the fates alone had sent her to Silverdale at the time of his visit.

It was at this interesting juncture that Mrs. Holt rattled her newspaper a little louder than usual, arose majestically, and addressed Mrs. Joshua.

"Annie, perhaps you will play for us," she said, as she crossed the room, and added to Honora: "I had no idea you spoke French so well, my dear. What have you and Monsieur de Toqueville been talking about?"

It was the Vicomte who, springing to his feet, replied nimbly: —

"Mademoiselle has been teaching me much of the customs of your country."

"And what," inquired Mrs. Holt, "have you been teaching Mademoiselle?"

The Vicomte laughed and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Ah, Madame, I wish I were qualified to be her teacher. The education of American young ladies is truly extraordinary."

"I was about to tell Monsieur de Toqueville," put in Honora, wickedly, "that he must see your Institution as soon as possible, and the work your girls are doing."

"Madame," said the Vicomte, after a scarcely perceptible pause, "I await my opportunity and your kindness."

"I will take you to-morrow," said Mrs. Holt.

At this instant a sound closely resembling a sneeze caused them to turn. Mr. Spence, with his handkerchief to his mouth, had his back turned to them, and was studiously regarding the bookcases.

After Honora had gone upstairs for the night she opened her door in response to a knock, to find Mrs. Holt on the threshold.

"My dear," said that lady, "I feel that I must say a word to you. I suppose you realize that you are attractive to men."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt."

"You're no fool, my dear, and it goes without saying that you do realize it — in the most innocent way, of course. But you have had no experience in life. Mind you, I don't say that the Vicomte de Toqueville isn't very much of a gentleman, but the French ideas about the relations of young men and young women are quite different and, I regret to say, less innocent than ours. I have no reason to believe that the Vicomte has come to this country to — to mend his fortunes. I know nothing about his property. But my sense of responsibility towards you has led me to tell him that you have no dot, for you somehow manage to give the impression of a young woman of fortune. Not purposely, my dear — I did not mean that." Mrs. Holt tapped gently Honora's flaming cheek. "I merely felt it my duty to drop you a word of warning against Monsieur de Toqueville — because he is a Frenchman."

"But, Mrs. Holt, I had no idea of — of falling in love with him," protested Honora, as soon as she could get her breath. "He seemed so kind — and so interested in everything."

"I dare say," said Mrs. Holt, dryly. "And I have always been led to believe that that is the most dangerous sort. I am sure, Honora, after what I have said, you will give him no encouragement."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," cried Honora again, "I shouldn't think of such a thing!"

"I am sure of it, Honora, now that you are forewarned. And your suggestion to take him to the Institution was not a bad one. I meant to do so anyway, and I think it will be good for him. Good night, my dear."

After the good lady had gone, Honora stood for some moments motionless. Then she turned out the light.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH THE VICOMTE CONTINUES HIS STUDIES

MR. ROBERT HOLT, Honora learned at breakfast, had two hobbies. She had never heard of what is called Forestry, and had always believed the wood of her country to be inexhaustible. It had never occurred to her to think of a wild forest as an example of nature's extravagance, and so flattering was her attention while Robert explained the primary principles of caring for trees that he actually offered to show her one of the tracts on the estate which he was treating. He could not, he regretted to say, take her that morning.

His other hobby was golf. He was president of the Sutton Golf Club, and had arranged to play a match with Mr. Spence. This gentleman, it appeared, was likewise an enthusiast, and had brought to Silverdale a leather bag filled with sticks.

"Won't you come, too, Miss Leffingwell?" he said, as he took a second cup of coffee.

Somewhat to the astonishment of the Holt family, Robert seconded the invitation.

"I'll bet, Robert," said Mr. Spence, gallantly, "that Miss Leffingwell can put it over both of us."

"Indeed, I can't play at all," exclaimed Honora in confusion. "And I shouldn't think of spoiling your match. And besides, I am going to drive with Susan."

"We can go another day, Honora," said Susan.

But Honora would not hear of it.

"Come over with me this afternoon, then," suggested Mr. Spence, "and I'll give you a lesson."

She thanked him gratefully.

"But it won't be much fun for you, I'm afraid," she added, as they left the dining room.

"Don't worry about me," he answered cheerfully. He was dressed in a checked golf costume, and wore a pink shirt of a new pattern. And he stood in front of her in the hall, glowing from his night's sleep, evidently in a high state of amusement.

"What's the matter?" she demanded.

"You did for the Vicomte all right," he said. "I'd give a good deal to see him going through the Institution."

"It wouldn't have hurt you, either," she retorted, and started up the stairs. Once she glanced back and saw him looking after her.

At the far end of the second story hall she perceived the Vicomte, who had not appeared at breakfast, coming out of his room. She paused with her hand on the walnut post and laughed a little, so ludicrous was his expression as he approached her.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, que vous êtes mechante!" he exclaimed. "But I forgive you, if you will not go off with that stock-broker. It must be that I see the Home sometime, and if I go now it is over. I forgive you. It is in the Bible that we must forgive our neighbour — how many times?"

"Seventy times seven," said Honora.

"But I make a condition," said the Vicomte, "that my neighbour shall be a woman, and young and beautiful. Then I care not how many times. Mademoiselle, if you would but have your portrait painted as you are, with your hand on the post, by Sargent or Carolus Duran, there would be some noise in the Salon."

"Is that you, Vicomte?" came a voice from the foot of the stairs — Mrs. Holt's voice.

"I come this instant, Madame," he replied, looking over the banisters, and added: "Malheureux que je suis! Perhaps, when I return, you will show me a little of the garden."

The duty of exhibiting to guests the sights of Silverdale and the neighbourhood had so often devolved upon Susan, who was methodical, that she had made out a route, or itinerary, for this purpose. There were some notes to leave and a sick woman and a child to see, which caused her to vary it a little that morning; and Honora, who sat in the sunlight and held the horse, wondered how it would feel to play the lady bountiful.

"I am so glad to have you all to myself for a little while, Honora," Susan said to her. "You are so popular that I begin to fear that I shall have to be unselfish, and share you."

"Oh, Susan," she said, "every one has been so kind. And I can't tell you how much I am enjoying this experience, which I feel I owe to you."

"I am so happy, dear, that it is giving you pleasure," said Susan.

"And don't think," exclaimed Honora, "that you won't see lots of me, for you will."

Her heart warmed to Susan, yet she could not but feel a secret pity for her, as one unable to make the most of her opportunities in the wonderful neighbourhood in which she lived. As they drove through the roads and in and out of the well-kept places, everybody they met had a bow and a smile for her friend — a greeting such as people give to those for whom they have only good-will. Young men and girls waved their racquets at her from the tennis-courts; and Honora envied them and wished that she, too, were a part of the gay life she saw, and were playing instead of being driven decorously about. She admired the trim, new houses in which they lived, set upon the slopes of the hills. Pleasure houses, they seemed to her, built expressly for joys which had been denied her.

"Do you see much of — of these people, Susan?" she asked.

"Not so much as I'd like," replied Susan, seriously. "I never seem to get time. We nearly always have guests at Silverdale, and then there are so many things one has to attend to. Perhaps you have noticed," she added, smiling a little, "that we are very serious and old-fashioned."

"Oh, no indeed," protested Honora. "It is such a wonderful experience for me to be here!"

"Well," said Susan, "we're having some young people to dinner to-night, and others next week — that's why I'm leaving these notes. And then we shall be a little livelier."

"Really, Susan, you mustn't think that I'm not having a good time. It is exciting to be in the same house with a real French Vicomte, and I like Mr. Spence tremendously."

Her friend was silent.

"Don't you?" demanded Honora.

To her surprise, the usually tolerant Susan did not wholly approve of Mr. Spence.

"He is a guest, and I ought not to criticise him," she answered. "But since you ask me, Honora, I have to be honest. It seems to me that his ambitions are a little sordid — that he is too intent upon growing rich."

"But I thought all New Yorkers were that way," exclaimed Honora, and added hastily, "except a few, like your family, Susan."

Susan laughed.

"You should marry a diplomat, my dear," she said. "After all, perhaps I am a little harsh. But there is a spirit of selfishness and — and of vulgarity in modern, fashionable New York which appears to be catching, like a disease. The worship of financial success seems to be in every one's blood."

"It is power," said Honora.

Susan glanced at her, but Honora did not remark the expression on her friend's face, so intent was she on the reflections which Susan's words had aroused. They had reached the far end of the Silverdale domain, and were driving along the shore of the lake that lay like a sapphire set amongst the green hills. It was here that the new house of the Robert Holts was building. Presently they came to Joshua's dairy farm, and Joshua himself was standing in the doorway of one of his immaculate barns. Honora put her hand on Susan's arm.

"Can't we see the cows?" she asked.

Susan looked surprised.

"I didn't know you were interested in cows, Honora."

"I am interested in everything," said Honora. "And I think your brother is so attractive."

It was at this moment that Joshua, with his hands in his pockets, demanded what his sister was doing there.

"Miss Leffingwell wants to look at the cattle, Josh," called Susan.

"Won't you show them to me, Mr. Holt," begged Honora. "I'd like so much to see some really good cattle, and to know a little more about them."

Joshua appeared incredulous. But, being of the male sex, he did not hide the fact that he was pleased.

"It seems strange to have somebody really want to see them," he said. "I tried to get Spence to come back this way, but the idea didn't seem to appeal to him. Here are some of the records."

"Records?" repeated Honora, looking at a mass of typewritten figures on the wall. "Do you mean to say you keep such an exact account of all the milk you get?"

Joshua laughed, and explained. She walked by his side over the concrete paving to the first of the varnished stalls.

"That," he said, and a certain pride had come into his voice, "is Lady Guinevere, and those ribbons are the prizes she has taken on both sides of the water."

"Isn't she a dear!" exclaimed Honora; "why, she's actually beautiful. I didn't know cows could be so beautiful."

"She isn't bad," admitted Joshua. "Of course the good points in a cow aren't necessarily features of beauty — for instance, these bones here," he added, pointing to the hips.

"But they seem to add, somehow, to the thoroughbred appearance," Honora declared.

"That's absolutely true," replied Joshua, — whereupon he began to talk. And Honora, still asking questions, followed him from stall to stall. "There are some more in the pasture," he said, when they had reached the end of the second building.

"Oh, couldn't I see them?" she asked.

"Surely," replied Joshua, with more of alacrity than one would have believed him capable. "I'll tell Susan to drive on, and you and I will walk home across the fields, if you like."

"I should love to," said Honora.

It was not without astonishment that the rest of the Holt family beheld them returning together as the gongs were sounding for luncheon. Mrs. Holt, upon perceiving them, began at once to shake her head and laugh.

"My dear, it can't be that you have captivated Joshua!" she exclaimed, in a tone that implied the carrying of a stronghold hitherto thought impregnable.

Honora blushed, whether from victory or embarrassment, or both, it is impossible to say.

"I'm afraid it's just the other way, Mrs. Holt," she replied; "Mr. Holt has captivated me."

"We'll call it mutual, Miss Leffingwell," declared Joshua, which was for him the height of gallantry.

"I only hope he hasn't bored you," said the good-natured Mrs. Joshua.

"Oh, dear, no," exclaimed Honora. "I don't see how any one could be bored looking at such magnificent animals as that Hardicanute."

It was at this moment that her eyes were drawn, by a seemingly resistless attraction, to Mrs. Robert's face. Her comment upon this latest conquest, though unexpressed, was disquieting. And in spite of herself, Honora blushed again.

At luncheon, in the midst of a general conversation, Mr. Spence made a remark *sotto voce* which should, in the ordinary course of events, have remained a secret.

"Susan," he said, "your friend Miss Leffingwell is a fascinator. She's got Robert's scalp, too, and he thought it a pretty good joke because I offered to teach her to play golf this afternoon."

It appeared that Susan's eyes could flash indignantly. Perhaps she resented Mr. Spence's calling her by her first name.

"Honora Leffingwell is the most natural and unspoiled person I know," she said.

There is, undoubtedly, a keen pleasure and an ample reward in teaching a pupil as apt and as eager to learn as Honora. And Mr. Spence, if he attempted at all to account for the swiftness with which the hours of that long afternoon slipped away, may have attributed their flight to the discovery in himself of hitherto latent talent for instruction. At the little Casino, he had bought, from the professional in charge of the course, a lady's driver; and she practised with exemplary patience the art of carrying one's hands through and of using the wrists in the stroke.

"Not quite, Miss Leffingwell," he would say, "but *so*."

Honora would try again.

"That's unusually good for a beginner, but you are inclined to chop it off a little still. Let it swing all the way round."

"Oh, dear, how you must *hate* me!"

"Hate you?" said Mr. Spence, searching in vain for words with which to obliterate such a false impression. "Anything but that!"

"Isn't it a wonderful spot?" she exclaimed, gazing off down the swale, emerald green in the afternoon light between its forest walls. In the distance, Silver Brook was gleaming amidst the meadows. They sat down on one of the benches and watched the groups of players pass. Mr. Spence produced his cigarette case, and presented it to her playfully.

"A little quiet whiff," he suggested. "There's not much chance over at the convent," and she gathered that it was thus he was pleased to designate Silverdale.

In one instant she was doubtful whether or not to be angry, and in the next grew ashamed of the provincialism which had caused her to suspect an insult. She took a cigarette, and he produced a gold match case, lighted a match, and held it up for her. Honora blew it out.

"You didn't think seriously that I smoked?" she asked, glancing at him.

"Why not?" he asked; "any number of girls do."

She tore away some of the rice paper and lifted the tobacco to her nose, and made a little grimace.

"Do you like to see women smoke?" she asked.

Mr. Spence admitted that there was something cosey about the custom, when it was well done.

"And I imagine," he added, "that you'd do it well."

"I'm sure I should make a frightful mess of it," she protested modestly.

"You do everything well," he said.

"Even golf?" she inquired mischievously.

"Even golf, for a beginner and — and a woman; you've got the swing in an astonishingly short time. In fact, you've been something of an eye-opener to me," he declared. "If I had been betting, I should have placed the odds about twenty to one against your coming from the West."

This Eastern complacency, although it did not lower Mr. Spence in her estimation, aroused Honora's pride.

"That shows how little New Yorkers know of the West," she replied, laughing. "Didn't you suppose there were any gentlewomen there?"

"Gentlewomen," repeated Mr. Spence, as though puzzled by the word, "gentlewomen, yes. But you might have been born anywhere."

Even her sense of loyalty to her native place was not strong enough to override this compliment.

"I like a girl with some dash and go to her," he proclaimed, and there could be no doubt about the one to whom he was attributing these qualities. "Savoir faire, as the French call it, and all that. I don't know much about that language, but the way you talk it makes Mrs. Holt's French and Susan's sound silly. I watched you last night when you were stringing the Vicomte."

"Oh, did you?" said Honora, demurely.

"You may have thought I was talking to Mrs. Robert," he said.

"I wasn't thinking anything about you," replied Honora, indignantly. "And besides, I wasn't 'stringing' the Vicomte. In the West we don't use anything like so much slang as you seem to use in New York."

"Oh, come now!" he exclaimed, laughingly, and apparently not the least out of countenance, "you made him think he was the only pebble on the beach. I have no idea what you were talking about."

"Literature," she said. "Perhaps that was the reason why you couldn't understand it."

"He may be interested in literature," replied Mr. Spence, "but it wouldn't be a bad guess to say that he was more interested in stocks and bonds."

"He doesn't talk about them, at any rate," said Honora.

"I'd respect him more if he did," he announced. "I know those fellows — they make love to every woman they meet. I saw him eying you at lunch."

Honora laughed.

"I imagine the Vicomte could make love charmingly," she said.

Mr. Spence suddenly became very solemn.

"Merely as a fellow-countryman, Miss Leffingwell —" he began, when she sprang to her feet, her eyes dancing, and finished the sentence.

"You would advise me to be on my guard against him, because, although I look twenty-five and experienced, I am only nineteen and inexperienced. Thank you."

He paused to light another cigarette before he followed her across the turf. But she had the incomprehensible feminine satisfaction of knowing, as they walked homeward, that the usual serenity of his disposition was slightly ruffled.

A sudden caprice impelled her, in the privacy of her bedroom that evening, to draw his portrait for Peter Erwin. The complacency of New York men was most amusing, she wrote, and the amount of slang they used would have been deemed vulgar in St. Louis. Nevertheless, she liked people to be sure of themselves, and there was something "insolent" about New York which appealed to her. Peter, when he read that letter, seemed to see Mr. Howard Spence in the flesh; or arrayed, rather, in the kind of cloth alluringly draped in the show-windows of fashionable tailors. For Honora, all unconsciously, wrote literature. Literature was invented before phonographs, and will endure after them. Peter could hear Mr. Spence talk, for a part of that gentleman's conversation — a characteristic part — was faithfully transcribed. And Peter detected a strain of admiration running even through the ridicule.

Peter showed that letter to Aunt Mary, whom it troubled, and to Uncle Tom, who laughed over it. There was also a lifelike portrait of the Vicomte, followed by the comment that he was charming, but very French; and the meaning of this last, though quite obvious, attribute remained obscure. He was possessed of one of the oldest titles and one of the oldest châteaux in France. (Although she did not say so, Honora had this on no less authority than that of the Vicomte himself.) Mrs. Holt — with her Victorian brooch and ear-rings and her watchful delft-blue eyes that somehow haunted one even when she was out of sight, with her ample bosom and the really kind heart it contained — was likewise depicted; and Mr. Holt, with his dried bread, and his garden which Honora wished Uncle Tom could see, and his prayers that lacked imagination. Joshua and his cows, Robert and his forest, Susan and her charities, the Institution, jolly Mrs. Joshua and enigmatical Mrs. Robert — all were there: and even a picture of the dinner-party that evening, when Honora sat next to a young Mr. Patterson with glasses and a studious manner, who knew George Hanbury at Harvard. The other guests were a florid Miss Chamberlin, whose person loudly proclaimed possessions, and a thin Miss Longman, who rented one of the Silverdale cottages and sketched.

Honora was seeing life. She sent her love to Peter, and begged him to write to her.

The next morning a mysterious change seemed to have passed over the members of the family during the night. It was Sunday. Honora, when she left her room, heard a swishing on the stairs — Mrs. Joshua, stiffly arrayed for the day. Even Mrs. Robert swished, but Mrs. Holt, in a bronze-coloured silk, swished most of all as she entered the library after a brief errand to the housekeeper's room. Mr. Holt was already arranging his book-marks in the Bible, while Joshua and Robert, in black cutaways that seemed to have the benumbing and paralyzing effect of strait-jackets, wandered aimlessly about the room, as though its walls were the limit of their movements. The children had a subdued and touch-me-not air that reminded Honora of her own youth.

It was not until prayers were over and the solemn gathering seated at the breakfast table that Mr. Spence burst upon it like an aurora. His flannel suit was of the lightest of grays; he wore white tennis shoes and a red tie, and it was plain, as he cheerfully bade them good morning, that he was wholly unaware of the enormity of his costume. There was a choking, breathless moment before Mrs. Holt broke the silence.

"Surely, Howard," she said, "you're not going to church in those clothes."

"I hadn't thought of going to church," replied Mr. Spence, helping himself to cherries.

"What do you intend to do?" asked his hostess.

"Read the stock reports for the week as soon as the newspapers arrive."

"There is no such thing as a Sunday newspaper in my house," said Mrs. Holt.

"No Sunday newspapers!" he exclaimed. And his eyes, as they encountered Honora's, — who sought to avoid them, — expressed a genuine dismay.

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Holt, "that I was right when I spoke of the pernicious effect of Wall Street upon young men. Your mother did not approve of Sunday newspapers."

During the rest of the meal, although he made a valiant attempt to hold his own, Mr. Spence was, so to speak, outlawed. Robert and Joshua must have had a secret sympathy for him. One of them mentioned the Vicomte.

"The Vicomte is a foreigner," declared Mrs. Holt. "I am in no sense responsible for him."

The Vicomte was at that moment propped up in bed, complaining to his valet about the weakness of the coffee. He made the remark (which he afterwards repeated to Honora) that weak coffee and the Protestant religion seemed inseparable; but he did not attempt to discover the whereabouts, in Sutton, of the Church of his fathers. He was not in the best of humours that morning, and his toilet had advanced no further when, an hour or so later, he perceived from behind his lace curtains Mr. Howard Spence, dressed with comparative soberness, handing Honora into the omnibus. The incident did not serve to improve the cynical mood in which the Vicomte found himself.

Indeed, the Vicomte, who had a theory concerning Mr. Spence's churchgoing, was not far from wrong. As may have been suspected, it was to Honora that credit was due. It was Honora whom Mr. Spence sought after breakfast, and to whom he declared that her presence alone prevented him from leaving that afternoon. It was Honora who told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself. And it was to Honora, after church was over and they were walking homeward together along the dusty road, that Mr. Spence remarked by way of a delicate compliment that "the morning had not been a total loss, after all!"

The little Presbyterian church stood on a hillside just outside of the village and was, as far as possible, the possession of the Holt family. The morning sunshine illuminated the angels in the Holt memorial window, and the inmates of the Holt Institution occupied all the back pews. Mrs. Joshua played the organ, and Susan, with several young women and a young man with a long coat and plastered hair, sang in the choir. The sermon of the elderly minister had to do with beliefs rather than deeds, and was the subject of discussion at luncheon.

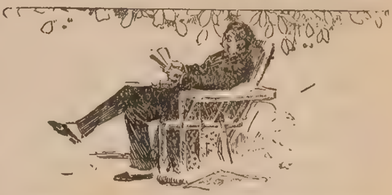
"It is very like a sermon I found in my room," said Honora.

"I left that book in your room, my dear, in the hope that you would not overlook it," said Mrs. Holt, approvingly. "Joshua, I wish you would read that sermon aloud to us."

"Oh, do, Mr. Holt!" begged Honora.

The Vicomte, who had been acting very strangely during the meal, showed unmistakable signs of a futile anger. He had asked Honora to walk with him.

"Of course," added Mrs. Holt, "no one need listen who doesn't wish to. Since you were good enough to reconsider your decision and attend divine service, Howard, I suppose I should be satisfied."



The reading took place in the library. Through the open window Honora perceived the form of Joshua asleep in the hammock, his Sunday coat all twisted under him. It worried her to picture his attire when he should wake up. Once Mrs. Robert looked in, smiled, said nothing, and went out again. At length, in a wicker chair under a distant tree on the lawn, Honora beheld the dejected outline of the Vicomte. He was trying to read, but every once in a while would lay down his book and gaze protractedly at the house, stroking his mustache. The low song of the bees around the shrubbery vied with Mr. Holt's slow reading. On the whole, the situation delighted Honora, who bit her lip to refrain from smiling at M. de Toqueville. When at last she emerged from the library, he rose precipitately and came towards her across the lawn, lifting his hands towards the pitiless puritan skies.

"Enfin!" he exclaimed tragically. "Ah, Mademoiselle, never in my life have I passed such a day!"

"Are you ill, Vicomte?" she asked.

"Ill! Were it not for you, I should be gone. You alone sustain me — it is for the pleasure of seeing you that I suffer. What kind of a ménage is this, then, where I am walked around Institutions, where I am forced to listen to the exposition of doctrines, where the coffee is weak, where Sunday, which the bon Dieu set aside for a jour de fête resembles to a day in purgatory?"

"But, Vicomte," Honora laughed, "you must remember that you are in America, and that you have come here to study our manners and customs."

"Ah, no," he cried, "ah, no, it cannot all be like this! I will not believe it. Mr. Holt, who sought to entertain me before luncheon, offered to show me his collection of Chinese carvings! I, who might be at Trouville or Cabourg! If it were not for you, Mademoiselle, I should not stay here — not one little minute," he said, with a slow intensity. "Behold what I suffer for your sake!"

"For my sake?" echoed Honora.

"For what else?" demanded the Vicomte, gazing upon her with the eyes of martyrdom. "It is not for my health, alas! Between the coffee and this dimanche I have the vertigo."

Honora laughed again at the memory of the dizzy Sunday afternoons of her childhood, when she had been taken to see Mr. Isham's curios.

"You are cruel," said the Vicomte; "you laugh at my tortures."

"On the contrary, I think I understand them," she replied. "I have often felt the same way."

"My instinct was true, then," he cried triumphantly; "the first time my eyes fell on you, I said to myself, 'ah, there is one who understands.' And I am seldom mistaken."

"Your experience with the opposite sex," ventured Honora, "must have made you infallible."

He shrugged and smiled, as one whose modesty forbade the mention of conquests.

"You do not belong here either, Mademoiselle," he said. "You are not like these people. You have tempérament, and a future — believe me. Why do you waste your time?"

"What do you mean, Vicomte?"

"Ah, it is not necessary to explain what I mean. It is that you do not choose to understand — you are far too clever. Why is it, then, that you bore yourself by regarding Institutions and listening to sermons in your jeunesse? It is all very well for Mademoiselle Susan, but you are not created for a religieuse. And again, it pleases you to spend hours with the stock-broker, who is as lacking in esprit as the bull of Joshua. He is no companion for you."

"I am afraid," she said reprovingly, "that you do not understand Mr. Spence."

"Par exemple!" cried the Vicomte; "have I not seen hundreds like him? Do not they come to Paris and live in the great hotels and demand cocktails and read the stock reports and send cablegrams all the day long? and go to the Folies Bergères, and yawn? Nom de nom, of what does his conversation consist? Of the price of railroads, — is it not so? I, who speak to you, have talked to him. Does he know how to make love?"

"That accomplishment is not thought of very highly in America," Honora replied.

"It is because you are a new country," he declared. "And you are mad over money. Money has taken the place of love."

"Is money so despised in France?" she asked. "I have heard — that you married for it!"

"Touché!" cried the Vicomte, laughing. "You see, I am frank with you. We marry for money, yes, but we do not make a god of it. It is our servant. You make it, and we enjoy it. Yes, and you, Mademoiselle — you, too, were made to enjoy. You do not belong here," he said, with a disdainful sweep of the arm. "Ah, I have solved you. You have in you the germ of the Riviera. You were born there."

Honora wondered if what he said were true. Was she different? She was having a great deal of pleasure at Silverdale; even the sermon reading, which would have bored her at home, had interested and amused her. But was it not from the novelty of these episodes, rather than from their special characters, that she received the stimulus? She glanced curiously towards the Vicomte, and met his eye.

They had been walking the while, and had crossed the lawn and entered one of the many paths which it had been Robert's pastime to cut through the woods. And at length they came out at a rustic summer-house set over the wooded valley. Honora, with one foot on the ground, sat on the railing gazing over the tree-tops; the Vicomte was on the bench beside her. His eyes sparkled and snapped, and suddenly she tingled with a sense that the situation was not without an element of danger.

"I had a feeling about you, last night at dinner," he said; "you reminded me of a line of Marcel Prévost, 'Cette femme ne sera pas aimée que parmi des drames.'"

"Nonsense," said Honora; "last night at dinner you were too much occupied with Miss Chamberlin to think of me."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, you have read me strangely if you think that. I talked to her with my lips, yes — but it was of you I was thinking. I was thinking that you were born to play a part in many dramas, that you have the fatal beauty which is rare in all ages." The Vicomte bent towards her, and his voice became caressing. "You cannot realize how beautiful you are," he sighed.

Suddenly he seized her hand, and before she could withdraw it she had the satisfaction of knowing the sensation of having it kissed. It was a strange sensation indeed. And the fact that she did not tingle with anger alone made her all the more angry. Trembling, her face burning, she leaped down from the railing and fled into the path. And there, seeing that he did not follow, she turned and faced him. He stood staring at her with eyes that had not ceased to sparkle.

"How cowardly of you!" she cried.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he answered fervently, "I would risk your anger a thousand times to see you like that once more. I cannot help my feelings — they were dead indeed if they did not respond to such an inspiration. Let them plead for my pardon."

Honora felt herself melting a little. After all, there might have been *some* excuse for it, and he made love divinely. When he had caught up with her, his contriteness was such that she was willing to believe he had not meant to insult her. And then, he was a Frenchman. As a proof of his versatility, if not of his good faith, he talked of neutral matters on the way back to the house, with the charming ease and lightness that was the gift of his race and class. On the borders of the wood they encountered the Robert Holts, walking with their children.

"Madame," said the Vicomte to Gwendolen, "your Silverdale is enchanting. We have been to that little summer-house which commands the valley."

"And are you still learning things about our country, Vicomte?" she asked, with a glance at Honora.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH HONORA WIDENS HER HORIZON

If it were not a digression, it might be interesting to speculate upon the reason why, in view of their expressed opinions of Silverdale, both the Vicomte and Mr. Spence remained during the week that followed. Robert, who went off in the middle of it with his family to the seashore, described it to Honora as a normal week. During its progress there came and went a missionary from China, a pianist, an English lady who had heard of the Institution, a Southern spinster with literary gifts, a youthful architect who had not built anything, and a young lawyer interested in settlement work.

The missionary presented our heroine with a book he had written about the Yang-tse-kiang; the Southern lady suspected her of literary gifts; the architect walked with her through the woods to the rustic shelter where the Vicomte had kissed her hand, and told her that he now comprehended the feelings of Christopher Wren when he conceived St. Paul's Cathedral, of Michael Angelo when he painted the Sistine Chapel. Even the serious young lawyer succumbed, though not without a struggle. When he had first seen Miss Leffingwell, he confessed, he had thought her frivolous. He had done her an injustice, and wished to acknowledge it before he left. And, since she was interested in settlement work, he hoped, if she were going through New York, that she would let him know. It would be a real pleasure to show her what he was doing.

Best of all, Honora, by her unselfishness, endeared herself to her hostess."

"I can't tell you what a real help you are to me, my dear," said that lady. "You have a remarkable gift with people for so young a girl, and I do you the credit of thinking that it all springs from a kind heart."

In the meantime, unknown to Mrs. Holt, who might in all conscience have had a knowledge of what may be called social chemistry, a drama was slowly unfolding itself. By no fault of Honora's, of course. There may have been some truth in the quotation of the Vicomte as applied to her — that she was destined to be loved only amidst the play of drama. If experience is worth anything, Monsieur de Toqueville should have been an expert in matters of the sex. Could it be possible, Honora asked herself more than once, that his feelings were deeper than her feminine instinct and the knowledge she had gleaned from novels led her to suspect?

It is painful to relate that the irregularity and deceit of the life the Vicomte was leading amused her, for existence at Silverdale was plainly not of a kind to make a gentleman of the Vicomte's temperament and habits ecstatically happy. And Honora was filled with a strange and unaccountable delight when she overheard him assuring Mrs. Wellfleet, the English lady of eleemosynary tendencies, that he was engaged in a study at first hand of Americans.

The time has come to acknowledge frankly that it was Honora he was studying — Honora as the type of young American womanhood. What he did not suspect was that young American womanhood was studying him. Thanks to a national System, she had had an apprenticeship; the heart-blood of Algernon Cartwright and many others had not been shed in vain. And the fact that she was playing with real fire, that this was a duel with the buttons off, lent a piquancy and zest to the pastime which it had hitherto lacked.

The Vicomte's feelings were by no means hidden processes to Honora, and it was as though she could lift the lid of the furnace at any time and behold the growth of the flame which she had lighted. Nay, nature had endowed her with such a gift that she could read the daily temperature as by a register hung on the outside, without getting scorched. Nor had there been any design on her part in thus tormenting his soul. He had not meant to remain more than four days at Silverdale, that she knew; he had not meant to come to America and fall in love with a penniless beauty — that she knew also. The climax would be interesting, if perchance uncomfortable.

It is wonderful what we can find the time to do, if we only try. Monsieur de Toqueville lent Honora novels, which she read in bed; but being in the full bloom of health and of a strong constitution, this practice did not prevent her from rising at seven to take a walk through the garden with Mr. Holt — a custom which he had come insensibly to depend upon. And in the brief conversations which she vouchsafed the Vicomte, they discussed his novels. In vain he pleaded, in caressing undertones, that she should ride with him. Honora had never been on a horse, but she did not tell him so. If she would but drive, or walk — only a little way — he would promise faithfully not to forget himself. Honora intimated that the period of his probation had not yet expired. If he waylaid her on the stairs, he got but little satisfaction.

"You converse by the hour with the missionaries, and take long promenades with the architects and charity workers, but to me you will give nothing," he complained.

"The persons of whom you speak are not dangerous," answered Honora, giving him a look.

The look, and being called dangerous, sent up the temperature several degrees. Frenchmen are not the only branch of the male sex who are complimented by being called dangerous. The Vicomte was desolated, so he said.

"I stay here only for you, and the coffee is slowly deranging me," he declared in French, for most of their conversations were in that language. If there were duplicity in this, Honora did not recognize it. "I stay here only for you, and how you are cruel! I live for you — how, the good God only knows. I exist — to see you for ten minutes a day."

"Oh, Vicomte, you exaggerate. If you were to count it up, I am sure you would find that we talk an hour at least, altogether. And then, although I am very young and inexperienced, I can imagine how many conquests you have made by the same arts."

"I suffer," he cried; "ah, no, you cannot look at me without perceiving it — you who are so heartless. And when I see you play at golf with that Mr. Spence — !"

"Surely," said Honora, "you can't object to my acquiring a new accomplishment when I have the opportunity, and Mr. Spence is so kind and good-natured about it."

"Do you think I have no eyes?" he exclaimed. "Have I not seen him look at you like the great animal of Joshua when he wants his supper? He is without esprit, without soul. There is nothing inside of him but money-making machinery."

"The most valuable of all machinery," she replied, laughingly.

"If I thought you believed that, Mademoiselle, if I thought you were like so many of your countrywomen in this respect, I should leave to-morrow," he declared.

"Don't be too sure, Vicomte," she cautioned him.

If one possessed a sense of humour and a certain knowledge of mankind, the spectacle of a young and successful Wall Street broker at Silverdale that week was apt to be diverting. Mr. Spence held his own. He advised the architect to make a specialty of country houses, and promised some day to order one: he disputed boldly with the other young man as to the practical uses of settlement work, and even measured swords with the missionary. Needless to say, he was not popular with these gentlemen. But he was also good-natured and obliging, and he did not object to repeating for the English lady certain phrases which she called "picturesque expressions," and which she wrote down with a gold pencil.

It is evident, from the Vicomte's remarks, that he found time to continue Honora's lessons in golf — or rather that she found time, in the midst of her manifold and self-imposed duties, to take them. And in this diversion she was encouraged by Mrs. Holt herself. On Saturday morning, the heat being unusual, they ended their game by common consent at the fourth hole and descended a wood road to

Silver Brook, to a spot which they had visited once before and had found attractive. Honora, after bathing her face in the pool, perched herself on a boulder. She was very fresh and radiant.

This fact, if she had not known it, she might have gathered from Mr. Spence's expression. He had laid down his coat; his sleeves were rolled up and his arms were tanned, and he stood smoking a cigarette and gazing at her with approbation. She lowered her eyes.

"Well, we've had a pretty good time, haven't we?" he remarked.

Lightning sometimes fails in its effect, but the look she flashed back at him from under her blue lashes seldom misses.

"I'm afraid I haven't been a very apt pupil," she replied modestly.

"You're on the highroad to a cup," he assured her. "If I could take you on for another week —" He paused, and an expression came into his eyes which was not new to Honora, nor peculiar to Mr. Spence. "I have to go back to town on Monday."

If Honora felt any regret at this announcement, she did not express it.

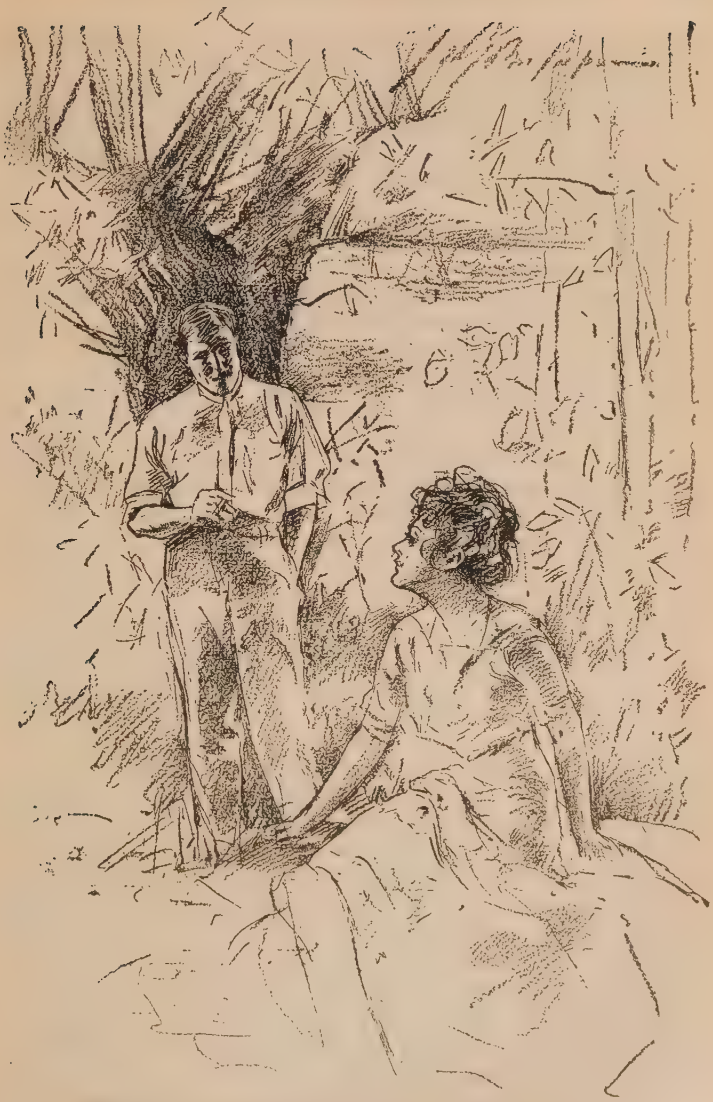
"I thought you couldn't stand Silverdale much longer," she replied.

"You know why I stayed," he said, and paused again — rather awkwardly, for Mr. Spence. But Honora was silent. "I had a letter this morning from my partner, Sidney Dallam, calling me back."

"I suppose you are very busy," said Honora, detaching a copper-green scale of moss from the boulder.

"The fact is," he explained, "that we have received an order of considerable importance, for which I am more or less responsible. Something of a compliment — since we are, after all, comparatively young men."

"Sometimes," said Honora, "sometimes I wish I were a man. Women are so hampered and circumscribed, and have to wait for things to happen to them. A man can do what he wants. He can go into Wall Street and fight



"WELL, WE'VE HAD A PRETTY GOOD TIME, HAVEN'T WE?"

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until he controls miles of railroads and thousands and thousands of men. That would be a career!"

"Yes," he agreed, smilingly, "it's worth fighting for."

Her eyes were burning with a strange light as she looked down the vista of the wood road by which they had come. He flung his cigarette into the water and took a step nearer her.

"How long have I known you?" he asked.

She started.

"Why, it's only a little more than a week," she said.

"Does it seem longer than that to you?"

"Yes," admitted Honora, colouring; "I suppose it's because we've been staying in the same house."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Spence, "that I have known you always."

Honora sat very still. It passed through her brain, without comment, that there was a certain haunting familiarity about this remark; some other voice, in some other place, had spoken it, and in very much the same tone.

"You're the kind of girl I admire," he declared. "I've been watching you — more than you have any idea of. You're adaptable. Put you down any place, and you take hold. For instance, it's a marvellous thing to me how you've handled all the curiosities up there this week."

"Oh, I like people," said Honora, "they interest me." And she laughed a little, nervously. She was aware that Mr. Spence was making love, in his own manner: the New York manner, undoubtedly; though what he said was changed by the new vibrations in his voice. He was making love, too, with a characteristic lack of apology and with assurance. She stole a glance at him, and beheld the image of a dominating man of affairs. He did not, it is true, evoke in her that extreme sensation which has been called a thrill. She had read somewhere that women were always expecting thrills, and never got them. Nevertheless, she had not realized how close a bond of sympathy had grown between them until this sudden announcement of his going back to New York. In a little while she too would be leaving for St. Louis. The probability that she would never see him again seemed graver than she would have believed.

"Will you miss me a little?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she said breathlessly, "and I shall be curious to know how your — your enterprise succeeds."

"Honora," he said, "it is only a week since I first met you, but I know my own mind. You are the woman I want, and I think I may say without boasting that I can give you what you desire in life — after a while. I love you. You are young, and just now I felt that perhaps I should have waited a year before speaking, but I was afraid of missing altogether what I know to be the great happiness of my life. Will you marry me?"

She sat silent upon the rock. She heard him speak, it is true; but, try as she would, the full significance of his words would not come to her. She had, indeed, no idea that he would propose, no notion that his heart was involved to such an extent. He was very near her, but he had not attempted to touch her. His voice, towards the end of his speech, had trembled with passion — a true note had been struck. And she had struck it, by no seeming effort! He wished to marry her!

He aroused her again.

"I have frightened you," he said.

She opened her eyes. What he beheld in them was not fright — it was nothing he had ever seen before. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he was awed. And, seeing him helpless, she put out her hands to him with a gesture that seemed to enhance her gift a thousand-fold. He had not realized what he was getting.

"I am not frightened," she said. "Yes, I will marry you."

He was not sure whether — so brief was the moment! — he had held and kissed her cheek. His arms were empty now, and he caught a glimpse of her poised on the road above him amidst the quivering, sunlit leaves, looking back at him over her shoulder.

He followed her, but she kept nimbly ahead of him until they came out into the open golf course. He tried to think, but failed. Never in his orderly life had anything so precipitate happened to him. He caught up with her, devoured her with his eyes, and beheld in marriage a delirium.

"Honora," he said thickly, "I can't grasp it."

She gave him a quick look, and a smile quivered at the corners of her mouth.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked.

"I am thinking of Mrs. Holt's expression when we tell her," said Honora. "But we shan't tell her yet, shall we, Howard? We'll have it for our own secret a little while."

The golf course being deserted, he pressed her arm.

"We'll tell her whenever you like, dear," he replied.

In spite of the fact that they drove Joshua's trotter much too rapidly in the heat of the day, they were late to lunch.

"I shall never be able to go in there and not give it away," he whispered to her on the stairs.

"You look like the Cheshire cat in the tree," whispered Honora, laughing, "only more purple, and not so ghostlike."

"I know I'm smiling," replied Howard, "I feel like it, but I can't help it. It won't come off. I want to blurt out the news to every one in the dining-room — to that little Frenchman, in particular."

Honora laughed again. Her imagination easily summoned up the tableau which such a proceeding would bring forth. The incredulity, the chagrin, the indignation, even, in some quarters. He conceived the household, with the exception of the Vicomte, precipitating themselves into his arms.

Honora, who was cool enough herself (no doubt owing to the superior training which women receive in matters of deportment), observed that his entrance was not a triumph of dissimulation. His colour was high, and his expression, indeed, a little idiotic; and he declared afterwards that he felt like a sandwich-man, with the news printed in red letters before and behind. Honora knew that the intense improbability of the truth would save them, and it did. Mrs. Holt remarked, slyly, that the game of golf must have hidden attractions, and regretted that she was too old to learn it.

"We went very slowly on account of the heat," Howard declared.

"I should say that you had gone very rapidly, from your face," retorted Mrs. Holt. In relaxing moods she indulged in banter.

Honora stepped into the breach. She would not trust her newly acquired fiancé to extricate himself.

"We were both very much worried, Mrs. Holt," she explained, "because we were late for lunch once before."

"I suppose I'll have to forgive you, my dear, especially with that colour. I am modern enough to approve of exercise for young girls, and I am sure your Aunt Mary will think Silverdale has done you good when I send you back to her."

"Oh, I'm sure she will," said Honora.

In the meantime Mr. Spence was concentrating all of his attention upon a jellied egg. Honora glanced at the Vicomte. He sat very stiff, and his manner of twisting his mustache reminded her of an animal sharpening its claws. It was at this moment that the butler handed her a telegram, which, with Mrs. Holt's permission, she opened and read twice before the meaning of it came to her.

"I hope it is no bad news, Honora," said Mrs. Holt.

"It's from Peter Erwin," she replied, still a little dazed. "He's in New York. And he's coming up on the five o'clock train to spend an hour with me."

"Oh," said Susan; "I remember his picture on your bureau at Sutcliffe. He had such a good face. And you told me about him."

"He is like my brother," Honora explained, aware that Howard was looking at her. "Only he is much older than I. He used to wheel me up and down when I was a baby. He was an errand boy in the bank then, and Uncle Tom took an interest in him, and now he is a lawyer. A very good one, I believe."

"I have a great respect for any man who makes his own way in life," said Mrs. Holt. "And since he is such an old friend, my dear, you must ask him to spend the night."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Holt," Honora answered.

It was, however, with mingled feelings that she thought of Peter's arrival at this time. Life, indeed, was full of strange coincidences!

There was a little door that led out of the house by the billiard room, Honora remembered, and contrived, after luncheon, to slip away and reach it. She felt that she must be alone, and if she went to her room she was likely to be disturbed by Susan or Mrs. Joshua — or indeed Mrs. Holt herself. Honora meant to tell Susan the first of all. She crossed the great lawn quickly, keeping as much as possible the trees and masses of shrubbery between herself and the house, and reached the forest. With a really large fund of energy at her disposal, Honora had never been one to believe in the useless expenditure of it; nor did she feel the intense desire which a girl of another temperament might have had, under the same conditions, to keep in motion. So she sat down on a bench within the borders of the wood.

It was not that she wished to reflect, in the ordinary meaning of the word, that she had sought seclusion, but rather to give her imagination free play. The enormity of the change that was to come into her life did not appall her in the least; but she had, in connection with it, a sense of unreality which, though not unpleasant, she sought unconsciously to dissipate. Howard Spence, she reflected with a smile, was surely solid and substantial enough, and she thought of him the more tenderly for the possession of these attributes. A castle founded on such a rock was not a castle in Spain!

It did not occur to Honora that her thoughts might be more of the castle than of the rock: of the heaven he was to hold on his shoulders than of the Hercules she had chosen to hold it.

She would write to her Aunt Mary and her Uncle Tom that very afternoon — one letter to both. Tears came into her eyes when she thought of them, and of their lonely life without her. But they would come on to New York to visit her often, and they would be proud of her. Of one thing she was sure — she must go home to them at once — on Tuesday. She would tell Mrs. Holt to-morrow, and Susan to-night. And, while pondering over the probable expression of that lady's amazement, it suddenly occurred to her that she must write the letter immediately, because Peter Erwin was coming.

What would he say? Should she tell him? She was surprised to find that the idea of doing so was painful to her. But she was aroused from these reflections by a step on the path, and raised her head to perceive the Vicomte. His face wore an expression of triumph.

"At last," he cried, "at last!" And he sat down on the bench beside her. Her first impulse was to rise, yet for some inexplicable reason she remained.

"I always suspected in you the qualities of a Monsieur Lecoq," she remarked. "You have an instinct for the chase."

"Mon dieu!" he said. "I have risked a stroke of the sun to find you. Why should you so continually run away from me?"

"To test your ingenuity, Vicomte."

"And that other one — the stock-broker — you do not avoid him. Diable, I am not blind, Mademoiselle. It is plain to me at luncheon that you have made boil the sluggish blood of that one. As for me — "

"Your boiling-point is lower," she said, smiling.

"Listen, Mademoiselle," he pursued, bending towards her. "It is not for my health that I stay here, as I have told you. It is for the sight of you, for the sound of the music of that low voice. It is in the hope that you will be a little kinder, that you will understand me a little better. And to-day, when I learn that still another is on his way to see you, I could sit still no longer. I do not fear that Spence, — no. But this other — what is he like?"

"He is the best type of American," replied Honora. "I am sure you will be interested in him, and like him."

The Vicomte shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not in America that you will find your destiny, Mademoiselle. You are made to grace a salon, a court, which you will not find in this country. Such a woman as you is thrown away here. You possess qualities — you will pardon me — in which your countrywomen are lacking, — esprit, imagination, élan, the power to bind people to you. I have read you as you have not read yourself. I have seen how you have served yourself by this famille Holt, and how at the same time you have kept their friendship."

"Vicomte!" she exclaimed.

"Ah, do not get angry," he begged; "such gifts are rare — they are sublime. They lead," he added, raising his arms, "to the heights."

Honora was silent. She was, indeed, not unmoved by his voice, into which there was creeping a vibrant note of passion. She was a little frightened, but likewise puzzled and interested. This was all so different from what she had expected of him. What did he mean? Was she indeed like that?

She was aware that he was speaking again, that he was telling her of a château in France which his ancestors had owned since the days of Louis XII; a grey pile that stood upon a thickly wooded height, — a château with a banquet hall, where kings had dined, with a chapel where kings had prayed, with a flowering terrace high above a gleaming river. It was there that his childhood had been passed. And as he spoke, she listened with mingled feelings, picturing the pageantry of life in such a place.

"I tell you this, Mademoiselle," he said, "that you may know I am not what you call an adventurer. Many of these, alas! come to your country. And I ask you to regard with some leniency customs which must be strange to Americans. When we marry in France, it is with a dot, and especially is it necessary amongst the families of our nobility."

Honora rose, the blood mounting to her temples.

"Mademoiselle," he cried, "do not misunderstand me. I would die rather than hurt your feelings. Listen, I pray. It was to tell you frankly that I came to this country for that purpose, — in order that I might live as my ancestors have lived, with a hôtel in Paris. But the château, grace à dieu, is not mortgaged, nor am I wholly impoverished. I have soixante quinze mille livres de rente, which is fifteen thousand dollars a year in your money, and which goes much farther in France. At the proper time, I will present these matters to your guardians. I have lived, but I have a heart, and I love you madly. Rather would I dwell with you in Provence, where I will cultivate the soil of my forefathers, than a palace on the Champs Elysées with another. We can come to Paris for two months, at least. For you I can throw my prospects out of the window with a light heart. Honore — how sweet is your name in my language — I love you to despair."

He seized her hand and pressed it to his lips, but she drew it gently away. It seemed to her that he had made the very air quiver with feeling, and she let herself wonder, for a moment, what life with him would be. Incredible as it seemed, he had proposed to her, a penniless girl! Her own voice was not quite steady as she answered him, and her eyes were filled with compassion.

"Vicomte," she said, "I did not know that you cared for me — that way. I thought — I thought you were amusing yourself."

"Amusing myself!" he exclaimed bitterly. "And you — were you amusing yourself?"

"I — I tried to avoid you," she replied, in a low voice. "I am engaged."

"Engaged!" He sprang to his feet. "Engaged! Ah, no, I will not believe it. You were engaged when you came here?"

She was no little alarmed by the violence which he threw into his words. At the same time, she was indignant. And yet a mischievous sprite within her led her on to tell him the truth.

"No, I am going to marry Mr. Howard Spence, although I do not wish it announced."

For a moment he stood motionless, speechless, staring at her, and then he seemed to sway a little and to choke.

"No, no," he cried, "it cannot be! My ears have deceived me. I am not sane. You are going to marry him —? Ah, you have sold yourself."

"Monsieur de Toqueville," she said, "you forget yourself. Mr. Spence is an honourable man, and I love him."

The Vicomte appeared to choke again. And then, suddenly, he became himself, although his voice was by no means natural. His elaborate and ironic bow she remembered for many years.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," he said, "and adieu. You will be good enough to convey my congratulations to Mr. Spence."

With a kind of military "about face" he turned and left her abruptly, and she watched him as he hurried across the lawn until he had disappeared behind the trees near the house. When she sat down on the bench again, she found that she was trembling a little. Was the unexpected to occur to her from now on? Was it true, as the Vicomte had said, that she was destined to be loved amidst the play of drama?

She felt sorry for him because he had loved her enough to fling to the winds his chances of wealth for her sake — a sufficient measure of the feelings of one of his nationality and caste. And she permitted, for an instant, her mind to linger on the supposition that Howard Spence had never come into her life; might she not, when the Vicomte had made his unexpected and generous avowal, have accepted him? She thought of the romances of her childish days, written at fever heat, in which ladies with titles moved around and gave commands and rebuked lovers who slipped in through wicket gates. And to think that she might have been a Vicomtesse and have lived in a castle!

A poor Vicomtesse, it is true.

CHAPTER XI

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

HONORA sat still upon the bench. After an indefinite period she saw through the trees a vehicle on the driveway, and in it a single passenger. And suddenly it occurred to her that the passenger must be Peter, for Mrs. Holt had announced her intention of sending for him. She arose and approached the house, not without a sense of agitation.

She halted a moment at a little distance from the porch, where he was talking with Howard Spence and Joshua, and the fact that he was an unchanged Peter came to her with a shock of surprise. So much, in less than a year, had happened to Honora! And the sight of him, and the sound of his voice, brought back with a rush memories of a forgotten past. How long it seemed since she had lived in St. Louis!

Yes, he was the same Peter, but her absence from him had served to sharpen her sense of certain characteristics. He was lounging in his chair with his long legs crossed, with one hand in his pocket, and talking to these men as though he had known them always. There was a quality about him which had never struck her before, and which eluded exact definition. It had never occurred to her, until now, when she saw him out of the element with which she had always associated him, that Peter Erwin had a personality. That personality was a mixture of simplicity and self-respect and — common sense. And, as Honora listened to his cheerful voice, she perceived that he had the gift of expressing himself clearly and forcibly and withal modestly; nor did it escape her that the other two men were listening with a certain deference. In her sensitive state she tried to evade the contrast thus suddenly presented to her between Peter and the man she had promised, that very morning, to marry.

Howard Spence was seated on the table, smoking a cigarette. Never, it seemed, had he more distinctly typified to her Prosperity. An attribute which she had admired in him, of strife without the appearance of strife, lost something of its value. To look at Peter was to wonder whether there could be such a thing as a well-groomed combatant; and until to-day she had never thought of Peter as a combatant. The sight of his lean face summoned, all undesired, the vague vision of an ideal, and perhaps it was this that caused her voice to falter a little as she came forward and called his name. He rose precipitately.

"What a surprise, Peter!" she said, as she took his hand. "How do you happen to be in the East?"

"An errand boy," he replied. "Somebody had to come, so they chose me. Incidentally," he added, smiling down at her, "it is a part of my education."

"We thought you were lost," said Howard Spence, significantly.

"Oh, no," she answered lightly, evading his look. "I was on the bench at the edge of the wood." She turned again to Peter. "How good of you to come up and see me!"

"I couldn't have resisted that," he declared, "if it were only for an hour."

"I've been trying to persuade him to stay a while with us," Joshua put in with unusual graciousness. "My mother will be disappointed not to see you."

"There is nothing I should like better, Mr. Holt," said Peter, simply, gazing off across the lawn. "Unfortunately I have to leave for the West to-night."

"Before you go," said Honora, "you must see this wonderful place. Come, we'll begin with the garden."

She had a desire now to take him away by himself, something she had wished, an hour ago, to avoid.

"Wouldn't you like a runabout?" suggested Joshua, hospitably.

Honora thanked him.

"I'm sure Mr. Erwin would rather walk," she replied. "Come, Peter, you must tell me all the news of home."

Spence accepted his dismissal with a fairly good grace, and gave no evidence of jealousy. He put his hand on Peter's shoulder.

"If you're ever in New York, Erwin," said he, "look me up — Dallam and Spence. We're members of the Exchange, so you won't have any trouble in finding us. I'd like to talk to you sometime about the West."

Peter thanked him.

For a little while, as they went down the driveway side by side, he was meditatively silent. She wondered what he thought of Howard Spence, until suddenly she remembered that her secret was still her own, that Peter had as yet no particular reason to single out Mr. Spence for especial consideration. She could not, however, resist saying, —

"New Yorkers are like that."

"Like what?" he asked.

She coloured.

"Like — Mr. Spence. A little — self-assertive, sure of themselves." She strove to keep out of her voice any suspicion of the agitation which was the result of the events of an extraordinary day, not yet ended. She knew that it would have been wiser not to have mentioned Howard; but Peter's silence, somehow, had impelled her to speak. "He has made quite an unusual success for so young a man."

Peter looked at her and shook his head.

"New York — success! What is to become of poor old St. Louis?" he inquired.

"Oh, I'm going back next week," Honora cried. "I wish I were going with you."

"And leave all this," he said incredulously, "for trolley rides and Forest Park and — and me?"

He stopped in the garden path and looked upon the picture she made standing in the sunlight against the blazing borders, her wide hat casting a shadow on her face. And the smile which she had known so well since childhood, indulgent, quizzical, with a touch of sadness, was in his eyes. She was conscious of a slight resentment. Was there, in fact, no change in her as the result of the events of those momentous ten months since she had seen him? And rather than a tolerance in which there was neither antagonism nor envy, she would have preferred from Peter an open disapproval of luxury, of the standards which he implied were hers. She felt that she had stepped into another world, but he refused to be dazzled by it. He insisted upon treating her as the same Honora.

"How did you leave Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary?" she asked.

They were counting the days, he said, until she should return, but they did not wish to curtail her visit. They did not expect her next week, he knew.

Honora coloured again.

"I feel — that I ought to go to them," she said.

He glanced at her as though her determination to leave Silverdale so soon surprised him.

"They will be very happy to see you, Honora," he said. "They have been very lonesome."

She softened. Some unaccountable impulse prompted her to ask: —

"And you? Have you missed me — a little?"

He did not answer, and she saw that he was profoundly affected. She laid a hand upon his arm.

"Oh, Peter, I didn't mean that," she cried. "I know you have. And I have missed you — terribly. It seems so strange seeing you here," she went on hurriedly. "There are so many things I want to show you. Tell me how it happened that you came on to New York."

"Somebody in the firm had to come," he said.

"In the firm!" she repeated. She did not grasp the full meaning of this change in his status, but she remembered that Uncle Tom had predicted it one day, and that it was an honour. "I never knew any one so secretive about their own affairs! Why didn't you write me you had been admitted to the firm? So you are a partner of Judge Brice."

"Brice, Graves, and Erwin," said Peter; "it sounds very grand, doesn't it? I can't get used to it myself."

"And what made you call yourself an errand boy?" she exclaimed reproachfully. "When I go back to the house I intend to tell Joshua Holt and — and Mr. Spence that you are a great lawyer."

Peter laughed.

"You'd better wait a few years before you say that," said he.

He took an interest in everything he saw, in Mr. Holt's flowers, in Joshua's cow barn, which they traversed, and declared, if he were ever rich enough, he would live in the country. They walked around the pond, — fringed now with yellow water-lilies on their floating green pads, — through the woods, and when the shadows were lengthening came out at the little summer-house over the valley of Silver Brook — the scene of that first memorable encounter with the Vicomte. At the sight of it the episode, and much else of recent happening, rushed back into Honora's mind, and she realized with suddenness that she had, in his companionship, unconsciously been led far afield and in pleasant places. Comparisons seemed inevitable.

She watched him with an unwonted tugging at her heart as he stood for a long time by the edge of the railing, gazing over the tree-tops of the valley towards the distant hazy hills. Nor did she understand what it was in him that now, on this day of days when she had definitely cast the die of life, when she had chosen her path, aroused this strange emotion. Why had she never felt it before? She had thought his face homely — now it seemed to shine with a transfiguring light. She recalled, with a pang, that she had criticised his clothes: to-day they seemed the expression of the man himself. Incredible is the range of human emotion! She felt a longing to throw herself into his arms, and to weep there.

He turned at length from the view.

"How wonderful!" he said.

"I didn't know — you cared for nature so much, Peter."

He looked at her strangely and put out his hand and drew her, unresisting, to the bench beside him.

"Are you in trouble, Honora?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she cried, "oh, no, I am — very happy."

"You may have thought it odd that I should have come here without knowing Mrs. Holt," he said gravely, "particularly when you were going home so soon. I do not know myself why I came. I am a matter-of-fact person, but I acted on an impulse."

"An impulse!" she faltered, avoiding the troubled, searching look in his eyes.

"Yes," he said, "an impulse. I can call it by no other name. I should have taken a train that leaves New York at noon; but I had a feeling this morning, which seemed almost like a presentiment, that I might be of some use to you."

"This morning?" She felt herself trembling, and she scarcely recognized Peter with such words on his lips. "I am happy — indeed I am. Only — I am overwrought — seeing you again — and you made me think of home."

"It was no doubt very foolish of me," he declared. "And if my coming has upset you —"

"Oh, no," she cried. "Please don't think so. It has given me a sense of — of security. That you were ready to help me if — if I needed you."

"You should always have known that," he replied. He rose and stood gazing off down the valley once more, and she watched him with her heart beating, with a sense of an impending crisis which she seemed powerless to stave off. And presently he turned to her, "Honora, I have loved you for many years," he said. "You were too young for me to speak of it. I did not intend to speak of it when I came here to-day. For many years I have hoped that some day you might be my wife. My one fear has been that I might lose you. Perhaps — perhaps it has been a dream. But I am willing to wait, should you wish to see more of the world. You are young yet, and I am offering myself for all time. There is no other woman for me, and never can be."

He paused and smiled down at her. But she did not speak. She could not.

"I know," he went on, "that you are ambitious. And with your gifts I do not blame you. I cannot offer you great wealth, but I say with confidence that I can offer you something better, something surer. I can take care of you and protect you, and I will devote my life to your happiness. Will you marry me?"

Her eyes were sparkling with tears,—tears, he remembered afterwards, that were like blue diamonds.

"Oh, Peter," she cried, "I wish I could! I have always—wished that I could. I can't."

"You can't?"

She shook her head.

"I—I have told no one yet—not even Aunt Mary. I am going to marry Mr. Spence."

For a long time he was silent, and she did not dare to look at the suffering in his face.

"Honora," he said at last, "my most earnest wish in life will be for your happiness. And whatever may come to you I hope that you will remember that I am your friend, to be counted on. And that I shall not change. Will you remember that?"

"Yes," she whispered. She looked at him now, and through the veil of her tears she seemed to see his soul shining in his eyes. The tones of a distant church bell were borne to them on the valley breeze.

Peter glanced at his watch.

"I am afraid," he said, "that I haven't time to go back to the house—my train goes at seven. Can I get down to the village through the valley?"

Honora pointed out the road, faintly perceptible through the trees beneath them.

"And you will apologize for my—departure to Mrs. Holt?"

She nodded. He took her hand, pressed it, and was gone. And presently, in a little clearing far below, he turned and waved his hat at her bravely.

CHAPTER XII

WHICH CONTAINS A SURPRISE FOR MRS. HOLT

How long she sat gazing with unseeing eyes down the valley Honora did not know. Distant mutterings of thunder aroused her; the evening sky had darkened, and angry-looking clouds of purple were gathering over the hills. She rose and hurried homeward. She had thought to enter by the billiard-room door, and so gain her own chamber without encountering the household; but she had reckoned without her hostess. Beyond the billiard room, in the little entry filled with potted plants, she came face to face with that lady, who was inciting a footman to further efforts in his attempt to close a recalcitrant skylight. Honora proved of more interest, and Mrs. Holt abandoned the skylight.

"Why, my dear," she said, "where have you been all afternoon?"

"I — I have been walking with Mr. Erwin, Mrs. Holt. I have been showing him Silverdale."

"And where is he? It seems to me I invited him to stay all night, and Joshua tells me he extended the invitation."

"We were in the little summer-house, and suddenly he discovered that it was late and he had to catch the seven o'clock train," faltered Honora, somewhat disconnectedly. "Otherwise he would have come to you himself and told you — how much he regretted not staying. He has to go to St. Louis to-night."

"Well," said Mrs. Holt, "this is an afternoon of surprises. The Vicomte has gone off, too, without even waiting to say good-by."

"The Vicomte!" exclaimed Honora.

"Didn't you see him, either, before he left?" inquired Mrs. Holt; "I thought perhaps you might be able to give me some further explanation of it."

"I?" exclaimed Honora. She felt ready to sink through the floor, and Mrs. Holt's delft-blue eyes haunted her afterwards like a nightmare.

"Didn't you see him, my dear? Didn't he tell you anything?"

"He — he didn't say he was going away."

"Did he seem disturbed about anything?" Mrs. Holt insisted.

"Now I think of it, he *did* seem a little disturbed."

"To save my life," said Mrs. Holt, "I can't understand it. He left a note for me saying that he had received a telegram, and that he had to go at once. I was at a meeting of my charity board. It seems a very strange proceeding for such an agreeable and polite man as the Vicomte, although he had his drawbacks, as all Continentals have. And at times I thought he was grave and moody, — didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, he was moody," Honora agreed eagerly.

"You noticed it, too," said Mrs. Holt. "But he was a charming man, and so interested in America and in the work we are doing. But I can't understand about the telegram. I had Carroll inquire of every servant in the house, and there is no knowledge of a telegram having come up from the village this afternoon."

"Perhaps the Vicomte might have met the messenger in the grounds," hazarded Honora.

At this point their attention was distracted by a noise that bore a striking resemblance to a suppressed laugh. The footman on the step-ladder began to rattle the skylight vigorously.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Woods?" said Mrs. Holt.

"It must have been some dust off the skylight, Madam, that got into my throat," he stammered, the colour of a geranium.

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Holt, "there is no dust on the skylight."

"It may be I swallowed the wrong way, looking up like, as I was, Madam," he ventured, rubbing the frame and looking at his finger to prove his former theory.

"You are very stupid not to be able to close it," she declared; "in a few minutes the place will be flooded. Tell Carroll to come and do it."

Honora suffered herself to be led limply through the library and up the stairs into Mrs. Holt's own boudoir, where a maid was closing the windows against the first great drops of the storm, which the wind was pelting against them. She drew the shades deftly, lighted the gas, and retired. Honora sank down in one of the upholstered light blue satin chairs and gazed at the shining brass of the coal grate set in the marble mantel, above which hung an engraving of Sir Joshua Reynolds' cherubs. She had an instinct that the climax of the drama was at hand.

Mrs. Holt sat down in the chair opposite.

"My dear," she began, "I told you the other day what an unexpected and welcome comfort and help you have been to me. You evidently inherit" (Mrs. Holt coughed slightly) "the art of entertaining and pleasing, and I need not warn you, my dear, against the dangers of such a gift. Your aunt has evidently brought you up with strictness and religious care. You have been very fortunate."

"Indeed I have, Mrs. Holt," echoed Honora, in bewilderment.

"And Susan," continued Mrs. Holt, "useful and willing as she is, does not possess your gift of taking people off my hands and entertaining them."

Honora could think of no reply to this. Her eyes — to which no one could be indifferent — were riveted on the face of her hostess, and how was the good lady to guess that her brain was reeling?

"I was about to say, my dear, that I expect to have a great deal of — well, of rather difficult company this summer. Next week, for instance, some prominent women in the Working Girls' Relief Society are coming, and on July the twenty-third I give a garden party for the delegates to the Charity Conference in New York. The Japanese Minister has promised to pay me a visit, and Sir Rupert Grant, who built those remarkable tuberculosis homes in England, you know, is arriving in August with his family. Then there are some foreign artists."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," exclaimed Honora; "how many interesting people you see!"

"Exactly, my dear. And I thought that, in addition to the fact that I have grown very fond of you, you would be very useful to me here, and that a summer with me might not be without its advantages. As your aunt will have you until you are married, which, I may say, without denying your attractions, is likely to be for some time, I intend to write to her to-night — with your consent — and ask her to allow you to remain with me all summer."

Honora sat transfixed, staring painfully at the big pendant ear-rings.

"It is so kind of you, Mrs. Holt —" she faltered.

"I can realize, my dear, that you would wish to get back to your aunt. The feeling does you infinite credit. But, on the other hand, besides the advantages which would accrue to you, it might, to put the matter delicately, be of a little benefit to your relations, who will have to think of your future."

"Indeed, it is good of you, but I must go back, Mrs. Holt."

"Of course," said Mrs. Holt, with a touch of dignity — for ere now people had left Silverdale before she wished them to — "of course, if you do not care to stay, that is quite another thing."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt, don't say that!" cried Honora, her face burning; "I cannot thank you enough for the pleasure you have given me. If — if things were different, I would stay with you gladly, although I should miss my family. But now, — now I feel that I must be with them. I — I am engaged to be married."

Honora still remembers the blank expression which appeared on the countenance of her hostess when she spoke these words. Mrs. Holt's cheeks twitched, her ear-rings quivered, and her bosom heaved — once.

"Engaged to be married!" she gasped.

"Yes," replied our heroine, humbly, "I was going to tell you — to-morrow."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Holt, after a silence, "it is to the young man who was here this afternoon, and whom I did not see. It accounts for his precipitate departure. But I must say, Honora, since frankness is one of my faults, that I feel it my duty to write to your aunt and disclaim all responsibility."

"It is not to Mr. Erwin," said Honora, meekly; "it is — it is to Mr. Spence."

Mrs. Holt seemed to find difficulty in speaking, Her former symptoms, which Honora had come to recognize as indicative of agitation, returned with alarming intensity. And when at length her voice made itself heard, it was scarcely recognizable.

"You are engaged — to — Howard Spence?"

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," exclaimed Honora, "it was as great a surprise to me — believe me — as it is to you."

But even the knowledge that they shared a common amazement did not appear, at once, to assuage Mrs. Holt's emotions.

"Do you love him?" she demanded abruptly.

Whereupon Honora burst into tears.

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she sobbed, "how can you ask?"

From this time on the course of events was not precisely logical. Mrs. Holt, setting in abeyance any ideas she may have had about the affair, took Honora in her arms, and against that ample bosom was sobbed out the pent-up excitement and emotion of an extraordinary day.

"There, there, my dear," said Mrs. Holt, stroking the dark hair, "I should not have asked you that — forgive me." And the worthy lady, quivering with sympathy now, remembered the time of her own engagement to Joshua. And the fact that the circumstances of that event differed somewhat from those of the present — in regularity, at least, increased rather than detracted from Mrs. Holt's sudden access of tenderness. The perplexing questions as to the probable result of such a marriage were swept away by a flood of feeling. "There, there, my dear, I did not mean to be harsh. What you told me was such a shock — such a surprise, and marriage is such a grave and sacred thing."

"I know it," sobbed Honora.

"And you are very young."

"Yes, Mrs. Holt."

"And it happened in my house."

"No," said Honora, "it happened — near the golf course."

Mrs. Holt smiled, and wiped her eyes.

"I mean, my dear, that I shall always feel responsible for bringing you together — for your future happiness. That is a great deal. I could have wished that you both had taken longer to reflect, but I hope with all my heart that you will be happy."

Honora lifted up a tear-stained face.

"He said it was because I was going away that — that he spoke," she said. "Oh, Mrs. Holt, I knew that you would be kind about it."

"Of course I am kind about it, my dear," said Mrs. Holt. "As I told you, I have grown to have an affection for you. I feel a little as though you belonged to me. And after this — this event, I expect to see a great deal of you. Howard Spence's mother was a very dear friend of mine. I was one of the first who knew her when she came to New York, from Troy, a widow, to educate her son. She was a very fine and a very courageous woman." Mrs. Holt paused a moment. "She hoped that Howard would be a lawyer."

"A lawyer!" Honora repeated.

"I lost sight of him for several years," continued Mrs. Holt, "but before I invited him here I made some inquiries about him from friends of mine in the financial world. I find that he is successful for so young a man, and well thought of. I have no doubt he will make a good husband, my dear, although I could wish he were not on the Stock Exchange. And I hope you will make him happy."

Whereupon the good lady kissed Honora, and dismissed her to dress for dinner.

"I shall write to your aunt at once," she said.

Requited love, unsettled condition that it is supposed to bring, did not interfere with Howard Spence's appetite at dinner. His spirits, as usual, were of the best, and from time to time Honora was aware of his glance. Then she lowered her eyes. She sat as in a dream; and, try as she might, her thoughts would not range themselves. She seemed to see him but dimly, to hear what he said faintly; and it conveyed nothing to her mind.

This man was to be her husband! Over and over she repeated it to herself. His name was Howard Spence, and he was on the highroad to riches and success, and she was to live in New York. Ten days before he had not existed for her. She could not bring herself to believe that he existed now. Did she love him? How could she love him, when she did not realize him? One thing she knew, that she had loved him that morning.

The fetters of her past life were broken, and this she would not realize. She had opened the door of the cage — for what? These were the fragments of thoughts that drifted through her mind like tattered clouds across an empty sky after a storm. Peter Erwin appeared to her more than once, and he was strangely real. But he belonged to the past. Course succeeded course, and she talked subconsciously to Mr. Holt and Joshua — such is the result of feminine training.

After dinner she stood on the porch. The rain had ceased, a cool damp breeze shook the drops from the leaves, and the stars were shining. Presently, at the sound of a step behind her, she started. He was standing at her shoulder.

"Honora!" he said.

She did not move.

"Honora, I haven't seen you — alone — since morning. It seems like a thousand years. Honora?"

"Yes."

"Did you mean it?

"Did I mean what?"

"When you said you'd marry me." His voice trembled a little. "I've been thinking of nothing but you all day. You're not — sorry? You haven't changed your mind?"

She shook her head.

"At dinner when you wouldn't look at me, and this afternoon —"

"No, I'm not sorry," she said, cutting him short. "I'm not sorry."

He put his arm about her with an air that was almost apologetic. And, seeing that she did not resist, he drew her to him and kissed her. Suddenly, unaccountably to her, she clung to him.

"You love me!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she whispered, "but I am tired. I — I am going upstairs, Howard. I am tired."

He kissed her again.

"I can't believe it!" he said. "I'll make you a queen. And we'll be married in the autumn, Honora." He nodded boyishly towards the open windows of the library. "Shall I tell them?" he asked. "I feel like shouting it. I can't hold on much longer. I wonder what the old lady will say!"

Honora disengaged herself from his arms and fled to the screen door. As she opened it, she turned and smiled back at him.

"Mrs. Holt knows already," she said.

And catching her skirt, she flew quickly up the stairs.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

SO LONG AS YE BOTH SHALL LIVE!

It was late November. And as Honora sat at the window of the drawing-room of the sleeping car, life seemed as fantastic and unreal as the moss-hung Southern forest into which she stared. She was happy, as a child is happy who is taken on an excursion into the unknown. The monotony of existence was at last broken, and riven the circumscribing walls. Limitless possibilities lay ahead.

The emancipation had not been without its pangs of sorrow, and there were moments of retrospection — as now. She saw herself on Uncle Tom's arm, walking up the aisle of the old church. How many Sundays of her life had she sat watching a shaft of sunlight strike across the stone pillars of its gothic arches! She saw, in the chancel, tall and grave and pale, Peter Erwin standing beside the man with the flushed face who was to be her husband. She heard again the familiar voice of Dr. Ewing reciting the words of that wonderful introduction. At other weddings she had been moved deeply. Why was her own so unrealizable?

"*Honora, wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy state of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?*"

She had promised. And they were walking out of the church, facing the great rose window with its blended colours, and the vaults above were ringing now with the volume of an immortal march.

After that an illogical series of events and pictures passed before her. She was in a corner of the carriage, her veil raised, gazing at her husband, who had kissed her passionately. He was there beside her, looking extremely well in his top hat and frock-coat, with a white flower in his buttonhole. He was the representative of the future she had deliberately chosen. And yet, by virtue of the strange ceremony through which they had passed, he seemed to have changed. In her attempt to seize upon a reality she looked out of the window. They were just passing the Hanbury mansion in Wayland Square, and her eyes fell upon the playroom windows under the wide cornice; and she wondered whether the doll's house were still in its place, its mute inhabitants waiting to be called by the names she had given them, and quickened into life once more.

Next she recalled the arrival at the little house that had been her home, summer and winter, for so many years of her life. A red and white awning, stretching up the length of the walk which once had run beside the tall pear trees, gave it an unrecognizable, gala air. Long had it stood there, patient, unpretentious, content that the great things should pass it by! And now, modest still, it had been singled out from amongst its neighbours and honoured. Was it honoured? It seemed to Honora, so fanciful this day, that its unwonted air of festival was unnatural. Why should the hour of departure from such a harbour of peace be celebrated?

She was standing beside her husband in the little parlour, while carriage doors slammed in the dusk outside; while one by one — a pageant of the past which she was leaving forever — the friends of her childhood came and went. Laughter and tears and kisses! And then, in no time at all, she found herself changing for the journey in the "little house under the hill." There, locked up in the little desk Cousin Eleanor had given her long ago, was the unfinished manuscript of that novel —

written at fever heat during those summer days in which she had sought to escape from a humdrum existence. And now — she had escaped. Aunt Mary, helpful under the most trying circumstances, was putting her articles in a bag, the initials on which she did not recognize — H. L. S. — Honora Leffingwell Spence; while old Catherine, tearful and inefficient, knelt before her, fumbling at her shoes. Honora, bending over, took the face of the faithful old servant and kissed it.

"Don't feel badly, Catherine," she said; "I'll be coming back often to see you, and you will be coming to see me."

"Will ye, darlint? The blessing of God be on you for those words — and you to be such a fine lady! It always was a fine lady ye were, with such a family and such a bringin' up. And now ye've married a rich man, as is right and proper. If it's rich as Crœsus he was, he'd be none too good for you."

"Catherine," said Aunt Mary, reprovingly, "what ideas you put into the child's head!"

"Sure, Miss Mary," cried Catherine, "it's always the great lady she was, and she a wee bit of a thing. And wasn't it yerself, Miss Mary, that dressed her like a princess?"

Then came the good-bys — the real ones. Uncle Tom, always the friend of young people, was surrounded by a group of bridesmaids in the hall. She clung to him. And Peter, who had the carriage ready. What would her wedding have been without Peter? As they drove towards the station, his was the image that remained persistently in her mind, bareheaded on the sidewalk in the light of the carriage lamps. The image of struggle.

She had married Prosperity. A whimsical question, that shocked her, irresistibly presented itself: was it not Prosperity that she had promised to love, honour, and obey?

It must not be thought that Honora was by any means discontented with her Prosperity. He was new — that was all. Howard looked new. But she remembered that he had always looked new; such was one of his greatest charms. In the long summer days since she had bade him good-by on her way through New York from Silverdale, Honora had constructed him: he was perpetual yet sophisticated Youth; he was Finance and Fashion; he was Power in correctly cut clothes. And when he had arrived in St. Louis to play his part in the wedding festivities, she had found her swan a swan indeed — he was all that she had dreamed of him. And she had tingled with pride as she introduced him to her friends, or gazed at him across the flower-laden table as he sat beside Edith Hanbury at the bridesmaids' dinner in Wayland Square.

The wedding ceremony had somehow upset her opinion of him, but Honora regarded this change as temporary. Julius Cæsar or George Washington himself must have been somewhat ridiculous as bridegrooms: and she had the sense to perceive that her own agitations as a bride were partly responsible. No matter how much a young girl may have trifled with that electric force in the male sex known as the grand passion, she shrinks from surrendering herself to its dominion. Honora shrank. He made love to her on the way to the station, and she was terrified. He actually forgot to smoke cigarettes. What he said was to the effect that he possessed at last the most wonderful and beautiful woman in the world, and she resented the implication of possession.

Nevertheless, in the glaring lights of the station, her courage and her pride in him revived, and he became again a normal and a marked man. Although the sex may resent it, few women are really indifferent to clothes, and Howard's well-fitting check suit had the magic touch of the metropolis. His manner matched his garments. Obsequious porters grasped his pig-skin bag, and seized Honora's; the man at the gate inclined his head as he examined their tickets, and the Pullman conductor himself showed them their stateroom, and plainly regarded them as important people far from home. Howard had the cosmopolitan air. He gave the man a dollar, and remarked that the New Orleans train was not exactly the Chicago and New York Limited.

"Not by a long shot," agreed the conductor, as he went out, softly closing the door behind him.

Whereupon the cosmopolitan air dropped from Mr. Howard Spence, not gracefully, and he became once more that superfluous and awkward and utterly banal individual, the husband.

"Let's go out and walk on the platform until the train starts," suggested Honora, desperately. "Oh, Howard, the shades are up! I'm sure I saw some one looking in!"

He laughed. But there was a light in his eyes that frightened her, and she deemed his laughter out of place. Was he, after all, an utterly different man than what she had thought him? Still laughing, he held to her wrist with one hand, and with the other pulled down the shades.

"This is good enough for me," he said. "At last — at last," he whispered, "all the red tape is over, and I've got you to myself! Do you love me just a little, Honora?"

"Of course I do," she faltered, still struggling, her face burning as from a fire.

"Then what's the matter?" he demanded.

"I don't know — I want air. Howard, please let me go. It's — it's so hot in here. You *must* let me go."

Her release, she felt afterwards, was due less to a physical than a mental effort. She seemed suddenly to have cowed him, and his resistance became enfeebled. She broke from him, and opened the door, and reached the cement platform and the cold air. When he joined her, there was something jokingly apologetic about his manner, and he was smoking a cigarette; and she could not help thinking that she would have respected him more if he had held her.

"Women beat me," he said. "They're the most erratic stock in the market."

It is worthy of remark how soon the human, and especially the feminine brain adjusts itself to new conditions. In a day or two life became real again, or rather romantic.

For the American husband in his proper place is an auxiliary who makes all things possible. His ability to "get things done," before it ceases to be a novelty, is a quality to be admired. Honora admired. An intimacy — if the word be not too strong — sprang up between them. They wandered through the quaint streets of New Orleans, that most foreign of American cities, searching out the tumble-down French houses; and Honora was never tired of imagining the romances and tragedies which must have taken place in them. The new scenes excited her, — the quaint cafés with their delicious, peppery Créole cooking, — and she would sit talking for a quarter of an hour at a time with Alphonse, who outdid himself to please the palate of a lady with such allure. He called her "Madame"; but well he knew, this student of human kind, that the title had not been of long duration.

Madame came from New York, without doubt? such was one of his questions, as he stood before them in answer to Howard's summons, rubbing his hands. And Honora, with a little thrill, acknowledged the accuracy of his guess. There was no dish of Alphonse's they did not taste. And Howard smilingly paid the bills. He was ecstatically proud of his wife, and although he did justice to the cooking, he cared but little for the mysterious courtyards, the Spanish buildings, and the novels of Mr. George W. Cable, which Honora devoured when she was too tired to walk about. He followed her obediently to the battlefield of New Orleans, and admired as obediently the sunset, when the sky was all silver-green through the magnolias, and the spreading live oaks hung with Spanish moss, and a silver bar lay upon the Father of Waters. Honora, with beating heart and flushed cheeks, felt these things: Howard felt them through her and watched — not the sunset — but the flame it lighted in her eyes.

He left her but twice a day, and then only for brief periods. He even felt a joy when she ventured to complain.

"I believe you care more for those horrid stocks than for me," she said. "I — I am just a novelty."

His answer, since they were alone in their sitting-room, was obvious.

"Howard," she cried, "how mean of you! Now I'll have to do my hair all over again. I've got such a lot of it — you've no idea how difficult it is."

"You bet I have!" he declared meaningly, and Honora blushed.

His pleasure of possession was increased when people turned to look at her on the street or in the dining room — to think that this remarkable creature was in reality his wife! Nor did the feeling grow less intense with time, being quite the same when they arrived at a fashionable resort in the Virginia mountains, on their way to New York. For such were the exactions of his calling that he could spare but two weeks for his honeymoon.

Honora's interest in her new surroundings was as great, and the sight of those towering ridges against the soft blue of the autumn skies inspired her. It was Indian summer here, the tang of wood smoke was in the air; in the valleys — as they drove — the haze was shot with the dust of gold, and through the gaps they looked across vast, unexplored valleys to other distant, blue-stained ridges that rose between them and the sunset. Honora took an infinite delight in the ramshackle cabins beside the red-clay roads, in the historic atmosphere of the ancient houses and porticoes of the Warm Springs, where the fathers of the Republic had come to take the waters. And one day, when a north wind had scattered the smoke and swept the sky, Howard followed her up the paths to the ridge's crest, where she stood like a Victory, her garments blowing, gazing off over the mighty billows to the westward. Howard had never seen a Victory, but his vision of domesticity was untroubled.

Although it was late in the season, the old-fashioned, rambling hotel was well filled, and people interested Honora as well as scenery — a proof of her human qualities. She chided Howard because he, too, was not more socially inclined.

"How can you expect me to be — now?" he demanded.

She told him he was a goose, although secretly admitting the justice of his defence. He knew four or five men in the hotel, with whom he talked stocks while waiting for Honora to complete her toilets; and he gathered from two of these, who were married, that patience was a necessary qualification in a husband. One evening they introduced their wives. Later, Howard revealed their identity — or rather that of the husbands.

"Bowker is one of the big men in the Faith Insurance Company, and Tyler is president of the Gotham Trust." He paused to light a cigarette, and smiled at her significantly. "If you can jolly the ladies along once in a while, Honora, it won't do any harm," he added. "You have a way with you, you know, — when you want to."

Honora grew scarlet.

"Howard!" she exclaimed.

He looked somewhat shamefaced.

"Well," he said, "I was only joking. Don't take it seriously. But it doesn't do any harm to be polite."

"I am always polite," she answered a little coldly.

Honeymoons, after all, are matters of conjecture, and what proportion of them contain disenchantments will never be known. Honora lay awake for a long time that night, and the poignant and ever recurring remembrance of her husband's remark sent the blood to her face like a flame. Would Peter, or George Hanbury, or any of the intimate friends of her childhood have said such a thing?

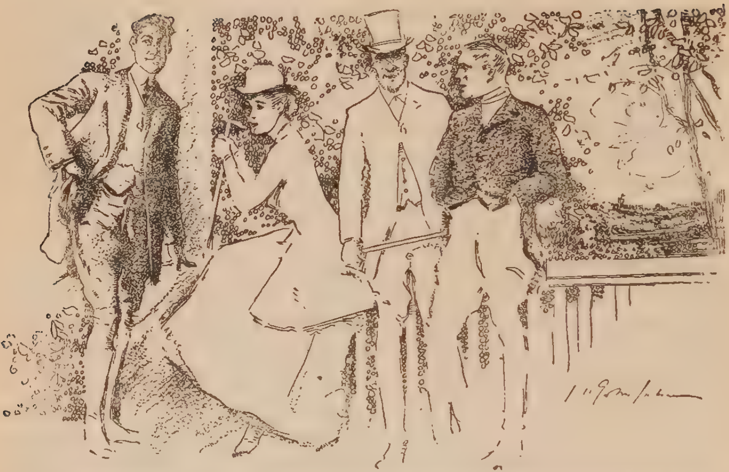
A new and wistful feeling of loneliness was upon her. For some days, with a certain sense of isolation and a tinge of envy which she would not acknowledge, she had been watching a group of well-dressed, clean-looking people galloping off on horseback or filling the six-seated buckboards. They were from New York — that she had discovered; and they did not mix with the others in the hotel. She had thought it strange that Howard did not know them, but for a reason which she did not analyze she hesitated to ask him who they were. They had rather a rude manner of staring — especially the men — and the air of deriving infinite amusement from that which went on about them. One of them, a young man with a lisp who was addressed by the singular name of "Toots," she had overheard demanding as she passed: who the deuce was the tall girl with the dark hair and the colour? Wherever she went, she was aware of them. It was foolish, she knew, but their presence seemed — in the magnitude which trifles are wont to assume in the night-watches — of late to have poisoned her pleasure.

Enlightenment as to the identity of these disturbing persons came, the next day, from an unexpected source. Indeed, from Mrs. Tyler. She loved brides, she said, and Honora seemed to her such a sweet bride. It was Mrs. Tyler's ambition to become thin (which was hitching her wagon to a star with a vengeance), and she invited our heroine to share her constitutional on the porch. Honora found the proceeding in the nature of an ordeal, for Mrs. Tyler's legs were short, her frizzled hair very blond, and the fact that it was natural made it seem, somehow, all the more damning.

They had scarcely begun to walk before Honora, with a sense of dismay of which she was ashamed, beheld some of the people who had occupied her thoughts come out of the door and form a laughing group at the end of the porch. She could not rid herself of the feeling that they were laughing at her. She tried in vain to drive them from her mind, to listen to Mrs. Tyler's account of how she, too, came as a bride to New York from some place with a classical name, and to the advice that accompanied the narration. The most conspicuous young woman in the group, in riding clothes, was seated on the railing, with the toe of one boot on the ground. Her profile was clear-cut and her chestnut hair tightly knotted behind under her hat. Every time they turned, this young woman stared at Honora amusedly.

"Nasty thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Tyler, suddenly and unexpectedly in the midst of a description of the delights of life in the metropolis.

"Who?" asked Honora.



"That young Mrs. Freddy Maitland, sitting on the rail. She's the rudest woman in New York."

A perversity of spirit which she could not control prompted Honora to reply: —

"Why, I think she is so good-looking, Mrs. Tyler. And she seems to have so much individuality and — independence."

"There!" cried Mrs. Tyler, triumphantly. "Once — not so very long ago — I was just as inexperienced as you, my dear. She belongs to that horribly fast set with which no self-respecting woman would be seen. It's an outrage that they should come to a hotel like this and act as though it belonged to them. She knows me quite as well as I know her, but when I am face to face she acts as though I was air."

Honora could not help thinking that this, at least, required some imagination on Mrs. Maitland's part. Mrs. Tyler had stopped for breath.

"I have been introduced to her twice," she continued, "but of course I wouldn't speak to her. The little man with the lisp, next to her, who is always acting in that silly way, they call Toots Cuthbert. He gets his name in the newspapers by leading cotillons in New York and Newport. And the tall, slim, blond one, with the green hat and the feather in it, is Jimmy Wing. He's the son of James Wing, the financier."

"I went to school at Sutcliffe with his sister," said Honora.

It seemed to Honora that Mrs. Tyler's manner underwent a change.

"My dear," she exclaimed, "did you go to Sutcliffe? What a wonderful school it is! I fully intend to send my daughter Louise there."

An almost irresistible desire came over Honora to run away. She excused herself instead, and hurried back towards her room. On the way she met Howard in the corridor, and he held a telegram in his hand.

"I've got some bad news, Honora," he said. "That is, bad from the point of view of our — honeymoon. Sid Dallam is swamped with business, and wants me in New York. I'm afraid we've got to cut it short."

To his astonishment she smiled.

"Oh, I'm so glad, Howard," she cried. "I — I don't like this place nearly so well as New Orleans. There are — so many people here."

He looked relieved, and patted her on the arm.

"We'll go to-night, old girl," he said.

CHAPTER II

"STAFFORD PARK"

THERE is a terrifying aspect of all great cities. Rome, with its leviathan aqueducts, its seething tenements clinging to the hills, its cruel, shining Palatine, must have overborne the provincial traveller coming up from Ostia. And Honora, as she stood on the deck of the ferry-boat, approaching New York for the second time in her life, could not overcome a sense of oppression. It was on a sharp December morning, and the steam of the hurrying craft was dazzling white in the early sun. Above and beyond the city rose, overpowering, a very different city, somehow, than that her imagination had first drawn. Each of that multitude of vast towers seemed a fortress now, manned by Celt and Hun and Israelite and Saxon, captained by Titans. And the strife between them was on a scale never known in the world before, a strife with modern arms and modern methods and modern brains, in which there was no mercy.

Hidden somewhere amidst those bristling miles of masonry to the northward of the towers was her future home. Her mind dwelt upon it now, for the first time, and tried to construct it. Once she had spoken to Howard of it, but he had smiled and avoided discussion. What would it be like to have a house of one's own in New York? A house on Fifth Avenue, as her girl friends had said when they laughingly congratulated her and begged her to remember that they came occasionally to New York. Those of us who, like Honora, believe in Providence, do not trouble ourselves with mere matters of dollars and cents. This morning, however, the huge material towers which she gazed upon seemed stronger than Providence, and she thought of her husband. Was his fibre sufficiently tough to become eventually the captain of one of those fortresses, to compete with the Maitlands and the Wings, and others she knew by name, calmly and efficiently intrenched there?

The boat was approaching the slip, and he came out to her from the cabin, where he had been industriously reading the stock reports, his newspapers thrust into his overcoat pocket.

"There's no place like New York, after all," he declared, and added, "when the market's up. We'll go to a hotel for breakfast."

For some reason she found it difficult to ask the question on her lips.

"I suppose," she said hesitatingly, "I suppose we couldn't go — home, Howard. You — you have never told me where we are to live."

As before, the reference to their home seemed to cause him amusement. He became very mysterious.

"Couldn't you pass away a few hours shopping this morning, my dear?"

"Oh, yes," replied Honora.

"While I gather in a few dollars," he continued. "I'll meet you at lunch, and then we'll go — home."

As the sun mounted higher, her spirits rose with it. New York, or that strip of it which is known to the more fortunate of human beings, is a place to raise one's spirits on a sparkling day in early winter. And Honora, as she drove in a hansom from shop to shop, felt a new sense of elation and independence. She was at one, now, with the prosperity that surrounded her: her purse no longer limited, her whims existing only to be gratified. Her reflections on this recently attained state alternated with alluring conjectures on the place of abode of which Howard had made such a mystery. Where was it? And why had he insisted, before showing it to her, upon waiting until afternoon?

Newly arrayed in the most becoming of grey furs, she met him at that hitherto fabled restaurant which in future days — she reflected — was to become so familiar — Delmonico's. Howard was awaiting her in the vestibule; and it was not without a little quiver of timidity and excitement and a consequent rise of colour that she followed the waiter to a table by the window. She felt as though the assembled fashionable world was staring at her, but presently gathered courage enough to gaze at the costumes of the women and the faces of the men. Howard, with a sang froid of which she felt a little proud, ordered a meal for which he eventually paid a fraction over eight dollars. What would Aunt Mary have said to such extravagance? He produced a large bunch of violets.

"With Sid Dallam's love," he said, as she pinned them on her gown. "I tried to get Lily — Mrs. Sid — for lunch, but you never can put your finger on her. She'll amuse you, Honora."

"Oh, Howard, it's so much pleasanter lunching alone to-day. I'm glad you didn't. And then afterwards — ?"

He refused, however, to be drawn. When they emerged she did not hear the directions he gave the cabman, and it was not until they turned into a narrow side street, which became dingier and dingier as they bumped their way westward, that she experienced a sudden sinking sensation.

"Howard!" she cried. "Where are you going? You must tell me."

"One of the prettiest suburbs in New Jersey — Rivington," he said. "Wait till you see the house."

"*Suburbs! Rivington! New Jersey!*" The words swam before Honora's eyes, like the great signs she had seen printed in black letters on the tall buildings from the ferry that morning. She had a sickening sensation, and the odour of his cigarette in the cab became unbearable. By an ironic trick of her memory, she recalled that she had told the clerks in the shops where she had made her purchases that she would send them her address later. How different that address from what she had imagined it!

"It's in the country!" she exclaimed.

To lunch at Delmonico's for eight dollars and live in Rivington!

Howard appeared disturbed. More than that, he appeared astonished, solicitous.

"Why, what's the matter, Honora?" he asked. "I thought you'd like it. It's a brand new house, and I got Lily Dallam to furnish it. She's a wonder on that sort of thing, and I told her to go ahead — within reason. I talked it over with your aunt and uncle, and they agreed with me you'd much rather live out there for a few years than in a flat."

"In a flat!" repeated Honora, with a shudder.

"Certainly," he said, flicking his ashes out of the window. "Who do you think I am, at my age? Frederick T. Maitland, or the owner of the Brougham Building?"

"But — Howard," she protested, "why didn't you talk it over with me?"

"Because I wanted to surprise you," he replied. "I spent a month and a half looking for that house. And you never seemed to care. It didn't occur to me that you would care — for the first few years," he added, and there was in his voice a note of reproach that did not escape her. "You never seemed inclined to discuss — business with me, Honora. I didn't think you were interested. Dallam and I are making money. We expect some day to be on Easy Street — so to speak — or Fifth Avenue. Some day, I hope, you can show some of these people the road. But just now what capital we have has to go into the business."

Strangely enough, in spite of the intensity of her disappointment, she felt nearer to her husband in that instant than at any time since their marriage. Honora, who could not bear to hurt any one's feelings, seized his hand repentantly. Tears started in her eyes.

"Oh, Howard, I must seem to you very ungrateful," she cried. "It was such a — such a surprise. I have never lived in the country, and I'm sure it will be delightful — and much more healthful than the city. Won't you forgive me?"

If he had known as much about the fluctuations of the feminine temperament as of those of stocks, the ease with which Honora executed this complete change of front might have disturbed him. Howard, as will be seen, possessed that quality which is loosely called good nature. In marriage, he had been told (and was ready to believe), the wind blew where it listed; and he was a wise husband who did not spend his time in inquiry as to its sources. He kissed her before he helped her out of the carriage. Again they crossed the North River, and he led her through the wooden ferry house on the New Jersey side to where the Rivington train was standing beside a platform shed.

There was no parlour car. Men and women — mostly women — with bundles were already appropriating the seats and racks, and Honora found herself wondering how many of these individuals were her future neighbours. That there might have been an hysterical element in the lively anticipation she exhibited during the journey did not occur to Howard Spence.

After many stops, — in forty-two minutes, to be exact, — the brakeman shouted out the name of the place which was to be her home, and of which she had been ignorant that morning. They alighted at an old red railroad station, were seized upon by a hackman in a coonskin coat, and thrust into a carriage that threatened to fall to pieces on the frozen macadam road. They passed through a village in which Honora had a glimpse of the drug store and grocery and the Grand Army Hall; then came detached houses of all ages in one- and two-acre plots — some above the road, for the country was rolling; a very attractive church of cream-coloured stone, and finally the carriage turned sharply to the left under an archway on which were the words "Stafford Park," and stopped at a very new curbstone in a very new gutter on the right.

"Here we are!" cried Howard, as he fished in his trousers pockets for money to pay the hackman.

Honora looked around her. Stafford Park consisted of a wide centre-way of red gravel, not yet packed, with an island in its middle planted with shrubbery and young trees, the bare branches of which formed a black tracery against the orange-red of the western sky. On both sides of this centre-way were concrete walks, with cross-walks from the curbs to the houses. There were six of these — three on each side — standing on a raised terrace and about two hundred feet apart. Beyond them, to the northward, Stafford Park was still a wilderness of second-growth hardwood, interspersed with a few cedars.

Honora's house, the first on the right, was exactly like the other five. If we look at it through her eyes, we shall find this similarity its main drawback. If we are a little older, however, and more sophisticated, we shall suspect the owner of Stafford Park and his architect of a design to make it appear imposing. It was (indefinite and much-abused term) Colonial; painted white; and double, with dormer windows of diagonal wood-surrounded panes in the roof. There was a large pillared porch on its least private side — namely, the front. A white-capped maid stood in the open doorway and smiled at Honora as she entered.

Honora walked through the rooms. There was nothing intricate about the house; it was as simple as two times four, and really too large for her and Howard. Her presents were installed, the pictures and photograph frames and chairs, even Mr. Isham's dining-room table and Cousin Eleanor's piano. The sight of these, and of the engraving which Aunt Mary had sent on, and which all her childhood had hung over her bed in the little room at home, brought the tears once more to her eyes. But she forced them back bravely.

These reflections were interrupted by the appearance of the little maid announcing that tea was ready, and bringing her two letters. One was from Susan Holt, and the other, written in a large, slanting, and angular handwriting, was signed Lily Dallam. It was dated from New York.

"My dear Honora," it ran, "I feel that I *must* call you so, for Sid and Howard, in addition to being partners, are such friends. I hesitated *so* long about furnishing your house, my dear, but Howard insisted, and said he wished to surprise you. I am sending you this line to welcome you, and to tell you that I have arranged with the furniture people to take any or *all* things back that you do not like, and exchange them. After all, they will be out of date in a few years, and Howard and Sid will have made so much money by that time, I hope, that I shall be able to leave my apartment, which is *dear*, and you will be coming to town."

Honora laid down the sheet, and began to tidy her hair before the glass of the highly polished bureau in her room. A line in Susan's letter occurred to her: "Mother hopes to see you soon. She asked me to tell you to buy good things which will last you all your life, and says that it pays."

The tea-table was steaming in the parlour in front of the wood fire in the blue tiled fireplace. The oak floor reflected its gleam, and that of the electric lights; the shades were drawn; a slight odour of steam heat pervaded the place. Howard, smoking a cigarette, was reclining on a sofa that evidently was not made for such a purpose, reading the evening newspapers.

"Well, Honora," he said, as she took her seat behind the tea-table, "you haven't told me how you like it. Pretty cosey, eh? And enough spare room to have people out over Sundays."

"Oh, Howard, I do like it," she cried, in a desperate attempt — which momentarily came near succeeding — to convince herself that she could have desired nothing more. "It's so sweet and clean and new — and all our own."

She succeeded, at any rate, in convincing Howard. In certain matters, he was easily convinced.

"I thought you'd be pleased when you saw it, my dear," he said.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT UNATTACHED

It was the poet Cowper who sang of domestic happiness as the only bliss that has survived the Fall. One of the burning and unsolved questions of to-day is, — will it survive the twentieth century? Will it survive rapid transit and bridge and Woman's Rights, the modern novel and modern drama, automobiles, flying machines, and intelligence offices; hotel, apartment, and suburban life, or four homes, or none at all? Is it a weed that will grow anywhere, in a crevice between two stones in the city? Or is it a plant that requires tender care and the water of self-sacrifice? Above all, is it desirable?

Our heroine, as may have been suspected, has an adaptable temperament. Her natural position is upright, but like the reed, she can bend gracefully, and yields only to spring back again blithely. Since this chronicle regards her, we must try to look at existence through her eyes, and those of some of her generation and her sex: we must give the four years of her life in Rivington the approximate value which she herself would have put upon it — which is a chapter. We must regard Rivington as a kind of purgatory, not solely a place of departed spirits, but of those which have not yet arrived; as one of the many temporary abodes of the Great Unattached.

No philosophical writer has as yet made the attempt to define the change — as profound as that of the tadpole to the frog — between the lover and the husband. An author of ideals would not dare to proclaim that this change is inevitable: some husbands — and some wives — are fortunate enough to escape it, but it is not unlikely to happen in our modern civilization. Just when it occurred in Howard Spence it is difficult to say, but we have got to consider him henceforth as a husband; one who regards his home as a shipyard rather than the sanctuary of a goddess; as a launching place, the ways of which are carefully greased, that he may slide off to business every morning with as little friction as possible, and return at night to rest undisturbed in a comfortable berth, to ponder over the combat of the morrow.

It would be inspiring to summon the vision of Honora, in rustling garments, poised as the figurehead of this craft, beckoning him on to battle and victory. Alas! the launching happened at that grimmest and most unromantic of hours — ten minutes of eight in the morning. There was a period, indeterminate, when she poured out his coffee with wifely zeal; a second period when she appeared at the foot of the stairs to kiss him as he was going out of the door; a third when, clad in an attractive dressing-gown, she waved him good-by from the window; and lastly, a fourth, which was only marked by an occasional protest on his part, when the coffee was weak.

"I'd gladly come down, Howard, if it seemed to make the least difference to you," said Honora. "But all you do is to sit with your newspaper propped up and read the stock reports, and growl when I ask you a polite question. You've no idea how long it makes the days out here, to get up early."

"It seems to me you put in a good many days in town," he retorted.

"Surely you don't expect me to spend all my time in Rivington!" she cried reproachfully; "I'd die. And then I am always having to get new cooks for you, because they can't make Hollandaise sauce like hotel chefs. Men have no idea how hard it is to keep house in the country, — I just wish you had to go to those horrid intelligence offices. You wouldn't stay in Rivington ten days. And all the good cooks drink."

Howard, indeed, with the aid of the village policeman, had had to expel from his kitchen one imperious female who swore like a dock hand, and who wounded Honora to the quick by remarking, as she departed in durance, that she had always lived with ladies and gentlemen and people who were somebody. The incident had tended further to detract from the romance of the country.

It is a mistake to suppose that the honeymoon disappears below the horizon with the rapidity of a tropical sun. And there is generally an afterglow. In spite of cooks and other minor clouds, in spite of visions of metropolitan triumphs (not shattered, but put away in camphor), life was touched with a certain novelty. There was a new runabout and a horse which Honora could drive herself, and she went to the station to meet her husband. On mild Saturday and Sunday afternoons they made long excursions into the country — until the golf season began, when the lessons begun at Silverdale were renewed. But after a while certain male competitors appeared, and the lessons were discontinued. Sunday, after his pile of newspapers had religiously been disposed of, became a field day. Indeed, it is impossible, without a twinge of pity, to behold Howard taking root in Rivington, for we know that sooner or later he will be dug up and transplanted. The soil was congenial. He played poker on the train with the Rivington husbands, and otherwise got along with them famously. And it was to him an enigma — when occasionally he allowed his thoughts to dwell upon such trivial matters — why Honora was not equally congenial with the wives.

There were, no doubt, interesting people in Rivington about whom many stories could be written: people with loves and fears and anxieties and joys, with illnesses and recoveries, with babies, but few grandchildren. There were weddings at the little church, and burials; there were dances at the golf club; there were Christmas trees, where most of the presents — like Honora's — came from afar, from family centres formed in a social period gone by; there were promotions for the heads of families, and consequent rejoicings over increases of income; there were movings; there were — inevitable in the ever grinding action of that remorseless law, the survival of the fittest —

commercial calamities, and the heartrending search for new employment.

Rivington called upon Honora in vehicles of all descriptions, in proportion to the improvidence or prosperity of the owners. And Honora returned the calls, and joined the Sewing Circle, and the Woman's Luncheon Club, which met for the purpose of literary discussion. In the evenings there were little dinners of six or eight, where the men talked business and the women house rent and groceries and gossip and the cheapest places in New York City to buy articles of the latest fashion. Some of them had actually built or were building houses that cost as much as thirty thousand dollars, with the inexplicable intention of remaining in Rivington the rest of their lives!

Honora was kind to these ladies. As we know, she was kind to everybody. She almost allowed two or three of them to hope that they might become her intimates, and made excursions to New York with them, and lunched in fashionable restaurants. Their range of discussion included babies and Robert Browning, the modern novel and the best matinée. It would be interesting to know why she treated them, on the whole, like travellers met by chance in a railroad station, from whom she was presently forever to depart. The time and manner of this departure were matters to be determined in the future.

It would be interesting to know, likewise, just at what period the intention of moving away from Rivington became fixed in Honora's mind. Honora circumscribed, Honora limited, Honora admitting defeat, and this chronicle would be finished. The gods exist somewhere, though many incarnations may be necessary to achieve their companionship. And no prison walls loom so high as to appall our heroine's soul. To exchange one prison for another is in itself something of a feat, and an argument that the thing may be done again. Neither do the wise ones beat themselves uselessly against brick or stone. Howard — poor man! — is fatuous enough to regard a great problem as being settled once and for all by a marriage certificate and a benediction; and labours under the delusion that henceforth he may come and go as he pleases, eat his breakfast in silence, sleep after dinner, and spend his Sundays at the Rivington Golf Club. It is as well to leave him, at present, in blissful ignorance of his future.

Our sympathies, however, must be with Honora, who has paid the price for heaven, and who discovers that by marriage she has merely joined the ranks of the Great Unattached. Hitherto it had been inconceivable to her that any one sufficiently prosperous could live in a city, or near it and dependent on it, without being socially a part of it. Most momentous of disillusions! With the exception of the Sidney Dallams and one or two young brokers who occasionally came out over Sunday, her husband had no friends in New York. Rivington and the Holt family (incongruous mixture!) formed the sum total of her acquaintance.

On Monday mornings in particular, if perchance she went to town, the huge signs which she read across the swamps, of breakfast foods and other necessaries, seemed, for some reason, best to express her isolation. Well-dressed, laughing poeple descended from omnibuses at the prettier stations, people who seemed all-sufficient to themselves; people she was sure she should like if only she knew them. Once the sight of her school friend, Ethel Wing, chatting with a tall young man, brought up a flood of recollections; again, in a millinery establishment, she came face to face with the attractive Mrs. Maitland whom she had seen at Hot Springs. Sometimes she would walk on Fifth Avenue, watching, with mingled sensations, the procession there. The colour, the movement, the sensation of living in a world where every one was fabulously wealthy, was at once a stimulation and a despair. Brougham after brougham passed, victoria after victoria, in which beautifully gowned women chatted gayly or sat back, impassive, amidst the cushions. Some of them, indeed, looked bored, but this did not mar the general effect of pleasure and prosperity. Even the people — well-dressed, too — in the hansom cabs were usually animated and smiling. On the sidewalk athletic, clearskinned girls passed her, sometimes with a man, sometimes in groups of two and three, going in and out of the expensive-looking shops with the large, plate-glass windows.

All of these women, apparently, had something definite to do, somewhere to go, some one to meet the very next minute. They protested to milliners and dressmakers if they were kept waiting, and even seemed impatient of time lost if one by chance bumped into them. But Honora had no imperative appointments. Lily Dallam was almost sure to be out, or going out immediately, and seemed to have more engagements than any one in New York.

"I'm so sorry, my dear," she would say, and add reproachfully: "why didn't you telephone me you were coming? If you had only let me know we might have lunched together or gone to the matinée. Now I have promised Clara Trowbridge to go to a lunch party at her house."

Mrs. Dallam had a most convincing way of saying such things, and in spite of one's self put one in the wrong for not having telephoned. But if indeed Honora telephoned — as she did once or twice in her innocence — Lily was quite as distressed.

"My dear, *why* didn't you let me know last night? Trixy Brent has given Lula Chandos his box at the Horse Show, and Lula would never, never forgive me if I backed out."

Although she lived in an apartment — in a most attractive one, to be sure — there could be no doubt about it that Lily Dallam was fashionable. She had a way with her, and her costumes were marvellous. She could have made her fortune either as a dressmaker or a house decorator, and she bought everything from "little" men and women whom she discovered herself. It was a curious fact that all of these small tradespeople eventually became fashionable, too. Lily was kind to Honora, and gave her their addresses before they grew to be great and insolent and careless whether one patronized them or not.

While we are confessing the trials and weaknesses of our heroine, we shall have to admit that she read, occasionally, the society columns of the newspapers. And in this manner she grew to have a certain familiarity with the doings of those favourites of fortune who had more delightful engagements than hours in which to fulfil them. So intimate was Lily Dallam with many of these Olympians that she spoke of them by their first names, or generally by their nicknames. Some two years after Honora's marriage the Dallams had taken a house in that much discussed colony of Quicksands, where sport and pleasure reigned supreme: and more than once the gown which Mrs. Sidney Dallam had worn to a polo match had been faithfully described in the public prints, or the dinners which she had given at the Quicksands Club. One of these dinners, Honora learned, had been given in honour of Mr. Trixton Brent.

"You ought to know Trixy, Honora," Mrs. Dallam declared; "he'd be crazy about you."

Time passed, however, and Mrs. Dallam made no attempt to bring about this most desirable meeting. When Honora and Howard went to town to dine with the Dallams, it was always at a restaurant, a partie carrée. Lily Dallam thought it dull to dine at home, and they went to the theatre afterwards — invariably a musical comedy. Although Honora did not care particularly for musical comedies, she always experienced a certain feverish stimulation which kept her wide awake on the midnight train to Rivington. Howard had a most exasperating habit of dozing in the corner of the seat.

"You are always sleepy when I have anything interesting to talk to you about," said Honora, "or reading stock reports. I scarcely see anything at all of you."

Howard roused himself.

"Where are we now?" he asked.

"Oh," cried Honora, "we haven't passed Hydeville. Howard, who is Trixton Brent?"

"What about him?" demanded her husband.

"Nothing — except that he is one of Lily's friends, and she said she knew — I should like him. I wish you would be more interested in people. Who is he?"

"One of the best-known operators in the market," Howard answered, and his air implied that a lack of knowledge of Mr. Brent was ignorance indeed ; "a daring gambler. He cornered cotton once, and raked in over a million. He's a sport, too."

"How old is he ?"

"About forty-three."

"Is he married ?" inquired Honora.

"He's divorced," said Howard. And she had to be content with so much of the gentleman's biography, for her husband relapsed into somnolence again. A few days later she saw a picture of Mr. Brent, in polo costume, in one of the magazines. She thought him good-looking, and wondered what kind of a wife he had had.

Honora, when she went to town for the day, generally could be sure of finding some one, at least, of the Holt family at home at luncheon time. They lived still in the same house on Madison Avenue to which Aunt Mary and Uncle Tom had been invited to breakfast on the day of Honora's arrival in her own country. It had a wide, brownstone front, with a basement, and a high flight of steps leading up to the door. Within, solemnity reigned, and this effect was largely produced by the prodigiously high ceilings and the black walnut doors and woodwork. On the second floor, the library where the family assembled was more cheerful. The books themselves, although in black-walnut cases, and the sun pouring in, assisted in making this effect.

Here, indeed, were stability and peace. Here Honora remade the acquaintance of the young settlement worker, and of the missionary, now on the Presbyterian Board of Missions. Here she charmed other friends and allies of the Holt family; and once met, somewhat to her surprise, two young married women who differed radically from the other guests of the house. Honora admired their gowns if not their manners; for they ignored her, and talked to Mrs. Holt about plans for raising money for the Working Girl's Relief Society.

"You should join us, my dear," said Mrs. Holt; "I am sure you would be interested in our work."

"I'd be so glad to, Mrs. Holt," replied Honora, "if only I didn't live in the country."

She came away, as usual, with the feeling of having run into a cul de sac. Mrs. Holt's house was a refuge, not an outlet; and thither Honora directed her steps when a distaste for lunching alone or with some of her Rivington friends in the hateful, selfish gayety of a fashionable restaurant overcame her; or when her moods had run through a cycle, and an atmosphere of religion and domesticity became congenial.

"Howard," she asked unexpectedly one evening, as he sat smoking beside the blue tiled mantel, "have you got on your winter flannels?"

"I'll bet a hundred dollars to ten cents," he cried, "that you've been lunching with Mrs. Holt."

"I think you're horrid," said Honora.

Something must be said for her. Domestic virtue, in the face of such mocking heresy, is exceptionally difficult of attainment.

Mrs. Holt had not been satisfied with Honora's and Susan's accounts of the house in Stafford Park. She felt called upon to inspect it. And for this purpose, in the spring following Honora's marriage, she made a pilgrimage to Rivington and spent the day. Honora met her at the station, and the drive homeward was occupied in answering innumerable questions on the characters, conditions, and modes of life of Honora's neighbours.

"Now, my dear," said Mrs. Holt, when they were seated before the fire after lunch, "I want you to feel that you can come to me for everything. I must congratulate you and Howard on being sensible enough to start your married life simply, in the country. I shall never forget the little house in which Mr. Holt and I began, and how blissfully happy I was." The good lady reached out and took Honora's hand in her own. "Not that your deep feeling for your husband will ever change. But men are more difficult to manage as they grow older, my dear, and the best of them require a little managing for their own good. And increased establishments bring added cares and responsibilities. Now that I am here, I have formed a very fair notion of what it ought to cost you to live in such a place. And I shall be glad to go over your housekeeping books with you, and tell you if you are being cheated — as I dare say you are."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," Honora faltered, "I — I haven't kept any books. Howard just pays the bills."

"You mean to say he hasn't given you any allowance!" cried Mrs. Holt, aghast. "You don't know what it costs to run this house?"

"No," said Honora, humbly. "I never thought of it. I have no idea what Howard's income may be."

"I'll write to Howard myself — to-night," declared Mrs. Holt.

"Please don't, Mrs. Holt. I'll — I'll speak to him," said Honora.

"Very well, then," the good lady agreed, "and I will send you one of my own books, with my own system, as soon as I get home. It is not your fault, my dear, it is Howard's. It is little short of criminal of him. I suppose this is one of the pernicious results of being on the Stock Exchange. New York is nothing like what it was when I was a girl — the extravagance by everybody is actually appalling. The whole city is bent upon lavishness and pleasure. And I am afraid it is very often the wives, Honora, who take the lead in prodigality. It all tends, my dear, to loosen the marriage tie — especially this frightful habit of dining in hotels and restaurants."

Before she left Mrs. Holt insisted on going over the house from top to bottom, from laundry to linen closet. Suffice it to say that the inspection was not without a certain criticism, which must be passed over.

"It is a little large, just for you and Howard, my dear," was her final comment. "But you are wise in providing for the future."

"For the future?" Honora repeated.

Mrs. Holt playfully pinched her cheek.

"When the children arrive, my dear, as I hope they will — soon," she said, smiling at Honora's colour. "Sometimes it all comes back to me — my own joy when Joshua was a baby. I was very foolish about him, no doubt. Annie and Gwendolen tell me so. I wouldn't even let the nurse sit up with him when he was getting his teeth. Mercy!" she exclaimed, glancing at the enamelled watch on her gown, — for long practice had enabled her to tell the time upside down, — "we'll be late for the train, my dear."

After returning from the station, Honora sat for a long time at her window, looking out on the park. The afternoon sunlight had the silvery tinge that comes to it in March; the red gravel of the centre driveway was very wet, and the grass of the lawns of the houses opposite already a vivid green; in the back-yards the white clothes snapped from the lines; and a group of children, followed by nurses with perambulators, tripped along the strip of sidewalk.

Why could not she feel the joys and desires of which Mrs. Holt had spoken? It never had occurred to her until to-day that they were lacking in her. Children! A home! Why was it that she did not want children? Why should such a natural longing be absent in her? Her mind went back to the days of her childhood dolls, and she smiled to think of their large families. She had always associated marriage with children — until she got married. And now she remembered that her childhood ideals of the matrimonial state had been very much like Mrs. Holt's own experience of it. Why then had that ideal gradually faded until, when marriage came to her, it was faint and shadowy indeed? Why were not her spirit and her hopes enclosed by the walls in which she sat?

The housekeeping book came from Mrs. Holt the next morning, but Honora did not mention it to her husband. Circumstances were her excuse: he had had a hard day on the Exchange, and at such times he showed a marked disinclination for the discussion of household matters. It was not until the autumn, in fact, that the subject of finance was mentioned between them, and after a period during which Howard had been unusually uncommunicative and morose. Just as electrical disturbances are said to be in some way connected with sun spots, so Honora learned that a certain glumness and tendency to discuss expenses on the part of her husband were synchronous with a depression in the market.

"I wish you'd learn to go a little slow, Honora," he said one evening. "The bills are pretty stiff this month. You don't seem to have any idea of the value of money."

"Oh, Howard," she exclaimed, after a moment's pause for breath, "how can you say such a thing, when I save you so much?"

"Save me so much!" he echoed.

"Yes. If I had gone to Ridley for this suit, he would have charged me two hundred dollars. I took such pains — all on your account — to find a little man Lily Dallam told me about, who actually made it for one hundred and twenty-five."

It was typical of the unreason of his sex that he failed to be impressed by this argument.

"If you go on saving that way," said he, "we'll be in the hands of a receiver by Christmas. I can't see any difference between buying one suit from Ridley — whoever he may be — and three from Lily Dallam's 'little man,' except that you spend more than three times as much money."

"Oh, I didn't get three! — I never thought you could be so unjust, Howard. Surely you don't want me to dress like these Rivington women, do you?"

"I can't see anything wrong with their clothes," he maintained.

"And to think that I was doing it all to please you!" she cried reproachfully.

"To please me!"

"Who else? We — we don't know anybody in New York. And I wanted you to be proud of me. I've tried so hard and — and sometimes you don't even look at my gowns, and say whether you like them — and they are all for you."

This argument, at least, did not fail of results, combined as it was with a hint of tears in Honora's voice. Its effect upon Howard was peculiar — he was at once irritated, disarmed, and softened. He put down his cigarette — and Honora was on his knee! He could not deny her attractions.

"How could you be so cruel, Howard?" she asked. "You know you wouldn't like me to be a slattern. It was my own idea to save money — I had a long talk about economy one day with Mrs. Holt. And you act as though you had such a lot of it when we're in town for dinner with these Rivington people. You always have champagne. If — if you're poor, you ought to have told me so, and I shouldn't have ordered another dinner gown."

"You've ordered another dinner gown!"

"Only a little one," said Honora, "the simplest kind. But if you're poor —"

She had made a discovery — to reflect upon his business success was to touch a sensitive nerve.

"I'm not poor," he declared. "But the bottom's dropped out of the market, and even old Wing is economizing. We'll have to put on the brakes for a while, Honora."

It was shortly after this that Honora departed on the first of her three visits to St. Louis.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW DOCTRINE

THIS history concerns a free and untrammelled — and, let us add, feminine — spirit. No lady is in the least interesting if restricted and contented with her restrictions, — a fact which the ladies of our nation are fast finding out. What would become of the Goddess of Liberty? And let us mark well, while we are making these observations, that Liberty is a goddess, not a god, although it has taken us in America over a century to realize a significance in the choice of her sex. And — another discovery! — she is not a *haus frau*. She is never domiciled, never fettered. Even the French, clever as they are, have not conceived her: equality and fraternity are neither kith nor kin of hers, and she laughs at them as myths — for she is a laughing lady. She alone of the three is real, and she alone is worshipped for attributes which she does not possess. She is a coquette, and she is never satisfied. If she were, she would not be Liberty: if she were, she would not be worshipped of men, but despised. If they understood her, they would not care for her. And finally, she comes not to bring peace, but a sword.

At quarter to seven one blustery evening of the April following their fourth anniversary Honora returned from New York to find her husband seated under the tall lamp in the room he somewhat facetiously called his "den," scanning the financial page of his newspaper. He was in his dressing gown, his slippered feet extended towards the hearth, smoking a cigarette. And on the stand beside him was a cocktail glass — empty.

"Howard," she cried, brushing his ashes from the table, "how can you be so untidy when you are so good-looking dressed up? I really believe you're getting fat. And there," she added, critically touching a place on the top of his head, "is a bald spot!"

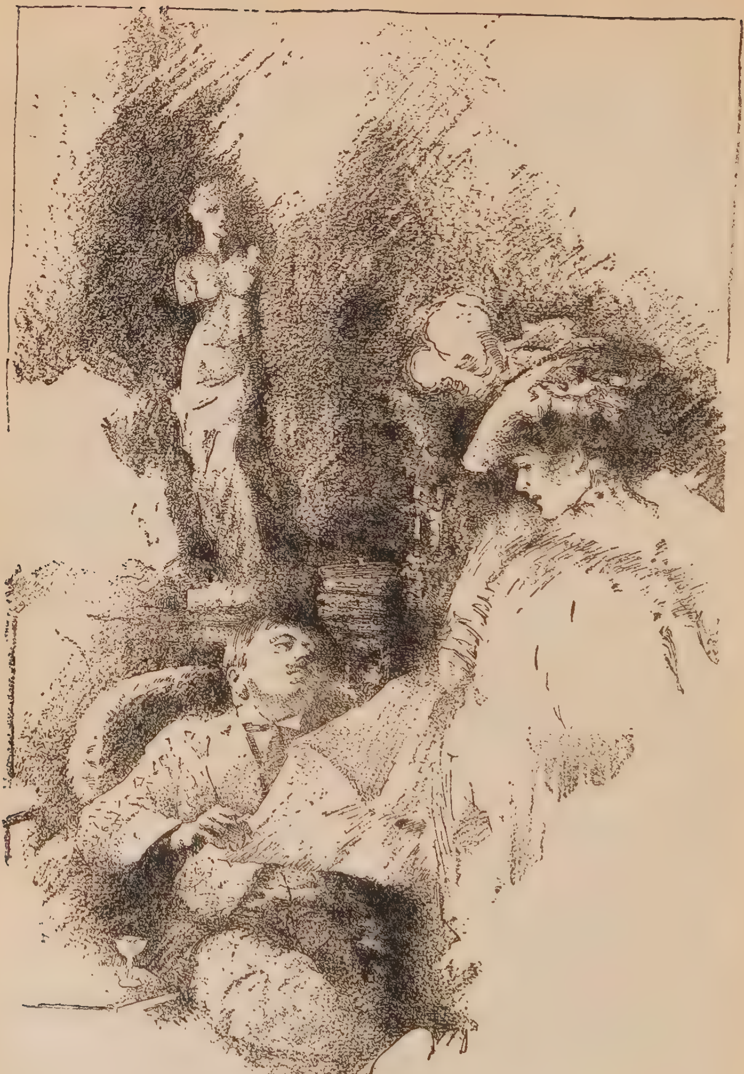
"Anything else?" he murmured, with his eyes still on the sheet.

"Lots," answered Honora, pulling down the newspaper from before his face. "For one thing, I'm not going to allow you to be a bear any more. I don't mean a Stock Exchange bear, but a domestic bear — which is much worse. You've got to notice me once in a while. If you don't, I'll get another husband. That's what women do in these days, you know, when the one they have doesn't take the trouble to make himself sufficiently agreeable. I'm sure I could get another one — quite easily," she declared.

He looked up at her as she stood facing him in the lamplight before the fire, and was forced to admit to himself that the boast was not wholly idle. A smile was on her lips, her eyes gleamed with health; her furs — of silver fox — were thrown back, the crimson roses pinned on her mauve afternoon gown matched the glow in her cheeks, while her hair mingled with the dusky shadows. Howard Spence experienced one of those startling, illuminating moments which come on occasions to the busy and self-absorbed husbands of his nation. Psychologists have a name for such a phenomenon. Ten minutes before, so far as his thoughts were concerned, she had not existed, and suddenly she had become a possession which he had not, in truth, sufficiently prized. Absurd though it was, the possibility which she had suggested aroused in him a slight uneasiness.

"You are a deuced good-looking woman, I'll say that for you, Honora," he admitted.

"Thanks," she answered, mockingly, and put her hands behind her back. "If I had only known you were going to settle down in Rivington and get fat and bald and wear dressing gowns and be a bear, I never should have married you — never, never, never! Oh, how young and simple and foolish I was! And the magnificent way you talked about



He looked up at her as she stood facing him

New York, and intimated that you were going to conquer the world. I believed you. Wasn't I a little idiot not to know that you'd make for a place like this and dig a hole and stay in it, and let the world go hang?"

He laughed, though it was a poor attempt. And she read in his eyes, which had not left her face, that he was more or less disturbed.

"I treat you pretty well, don't I, Honora?" he asked. There was an amorous, apologetic note in his voice that amused her, and reminded her of the honeymoon. "I give you all the money you want — or rather — you take it, — and I don't kick up a row, except when the market goes to pieces —"

"When you act as though we'd have to live in Harlem — which couldn't be much worse," she interrupted. "And you stay in town all day and have no end of fun making money, — for you like to make money, and expect me to amuse myself the best part of my life with a lot of women who don't know enough to keep thin."

He laughed again, but still uneasily. Honora was still smiling.

"What's got into you?" he demanded. "I know you don't like Rivington, but you never broke loose this way before."

"If you stay here," said Honora, with a new firmness, "it will be alone. I can't see what you want with a wife, anyway. I've been thinking you over lately. I don't do anything for you, except to keep getting you cooks — and anybody could do that. You don't seem to need me in any possible way. All I do is to loiter around the house and read and play the piano, or go to New York and buy clothes for nobody to look at except strangers in restaurants. I'm worth more than that. I think I'll get married again."

"Great Lord, what are you talking about?" he exclaimed when he got his breath.

"I think I'll take a man next time," she continued calmly, "who has something to him, some ambition. The kind of man I thought I was getting when I took you —

only I shouldn't be fooled again. Women remarry a good deal in these days, and I'm beginning to see the reason why. And the women who have done it appear to be perfectly happy — much happier than they were at first. I saw one of them at Lily Dallam's this afternoon. She was radiant. I can't see any particular reason why a woman should be tied all her life to her husband's apron strings — or whatever he wears — and waste the talents she has. It's wicked, when she might be the making of some man who is worth something, and who lives somewhere."

Her husband got up.

"Jehosaphat!" he cried, "I never heard such talk in my life."

The idea that her love for him might have ebbed a little, or that she would for a moment consider leaving him, he rejected as preposterous, of course: the reputation which the majority of her sex had made throughout the ages for constancy to the marriage tie was not to be so lightly dissipated. Nevertheless, there was in her words a new undertone of determination he had never before heard — or, at least, noticed.

There was one argument, or panacea, which had generally worked like a charm, although some time had elapsed since last he had resorted to it. He tried to seize and kiss her, but she eluded him. At last he caught her, out of breath, in the corner of the room.

"Howard — you'll knock over the lamp — you'll ruin my gown — and then you'll have to buy me another. I *did* mean it," she insisted, holding back her head; "you'll have to choose between Rivington and me. It's — it's an ultimatum. There were at least three awfully attractive men at Lily Dallam's tea — I won't tell you who they were — who would be glad to marry me in a minute."

He drew her down on the arm of his chair.

"Now that Lily has a house in town," he said weakly, "I suppose you think you've got to have one."

"Oh, Howard, it is such a dear house. I had no idea that so much could be done with so narrow a front. It's all French, with mirrors and big white panels and satin chairs and sofas, and a carved gilt piano that she got for nothing from a dealer she knows; and church candlesticks. The mirrors give it the effect of being larger than it really is. I've only two criticisms to make: it's too far from Fifth Avenue, and one can scarcely turn around in it without knocking something down — a photograph frame or a flower vase or one of her spindle-legged chairs. It was only a hideous, old-fashioned stone front when she bought it. I suppose nobody but Reggie Farwell could have made anything out of it."

"Who's Reggie Farwell?" inquired her husband.

"Howard, do you really mean to say you've never heard of Reggie Farwell? Lily was so lucky to get him — she says he wouldn't have done the house if he hadn't been such a friend of hers. And he was coming to the tea this afternoon — only something happened at the last minute, and he couldn't. She was so disappointed. He built the Maitlands' house, and did over the Cecil Graingers'. And he's going to do our house — some day."

"Why not right away?" asked Howard.

"Because I've made up my mind to be very, very reasonable," she replied. "We're going to Quicksands for a while, first."

"To Quicksands!" he repeated. But in spite of himself he experienced a feeling of relief that she had not demanded a town mansion on the spot.

Honora sprang to her feet.

"Get up, Howard," she cried, "remember that we're going out for dinner — and you'll never be ready."

"Hold on," he protested, "I don't know about this Quicksands proposition. Let's talk it over a little more —"

"We'll talk it over another time," she replied. "But — remember my ultimatum. And I am only taking you there for your own good."

"For my own good!"

"Yes. To get you out of a rut. To keep you from becoming commonplace and obscure and — and everything you promised not to be when you married me," she retorted from the doorway, her eyes still alight with that disturbing and tantalizing fire. "It is my last desperate effort as a wife to save you from baldness, obesity, and nonentity." Wherewith she disappeared into her room and closed the door.

We read of earthquakes in the tropics and at the ends of the earth with commiseration, it is true, yet with the fond belief that the ground on which we have built is so firm that our own *lares* and *penates* are in no danger of being shaken down. And in the same spirit we learn of other people's domestic cataclysms. Howard Spence had had only a slight shock, but it frightened him and destroyed his sense of immunity. And during the week that followed he lacked the moral courage either to discuss the subject of Quicksands thoroughly or to let it alone: to put down his foot like a Turk or accede like a Crichton.

Either course might have saved him. One trouble with the unfortunate man was that he realized but dimly the gravity of the crisis. He had laboured under the delusion that matrimonial conditions were still what they had been in the Eighteenth Century — although it is doubtful whether he had ever thought of that century. Characteristically, he considered the troublesome affair chiefly from its business side. His ambition, if we may use so large a word for the sentiment that had filled his breast, had been coincident with his prenuptial passion for Honora. And she had contrived, after four years, in some mysterious way to stir up that ambition once more; to make him uncomfortable; to compel him to ask himself whether he were not sliding downhill; to wonder whether living at Quicksands might not bring him in touch with important interests which had as yet eluded him. And, above all, — if the idea be put a little more crudely and definitely than it occurred in his thoughts, — he awoke to the realization that his wife was an asset he had hitherto utterly neglected. Inconceivable though it were (a middle-of-the-night reflection), if he insisted on trying to keep such a woman bottled up in Rivington she *might* some day pack up and leave him. One never could tell what a woman would do in these days. Les sacrées femmes.

We are indebted to Honora for this view of her husband's mental processes. She watched them, as it were, through a glass in the side of his head, and incidentally derived infinite amusement therefrom. With instinctive wisdom she refrained from tinkering.

An invitation to dine with the Dallams', in their own house, arrived a day or two after the tea which Honora had attended there. Although Lily had always been cordial, Honora thought this note couched in terms of unusual warmth. She was implored to come early, because Lily had so much to talk to her about which couldn't be written on account of a splitting headache. In moderate obedience to this summons Honora arrived, on the evening in question, before the ornamental ironwork of Mrs. Dallam's front door at a few minutes after seven o'clock. Honora paused in the spring twilight to contemplate the house, which stood out incongruously from its sombre, brownstone brothers and sisters with noisy basement kitchens. The Third Avenue Elevated, "so handy for Sid," roared across the gap scarcely a block away; and just as the door was opened the tightest of little blue broughams, pulled by a huge chestnut horse and driven by the tiniest of grooms in top boots, drew up at the curb. And out of it burst a resplendent lady — Mrs. Dallam.

"Oh, it's you, Honora," she cried. "*Am* I late? I'm so sorry. But I just couldn't help it. It's all Clara Trowbridge's fault. She *insisted* on my staying to meet that Rénée Labride who dances so divinely in Lady Emmeline. She's sweet. I've seen her eight times." Here she took Honora's arm, and faced her towards the street. "What do you think of my turnout? Isn't he a darling?"

"Is he — full grown?" asked Honora.

Lilly Dallam burst out laughing.

"Bless you, I don't mean Patrick, — although I had a terrible time finding him. I mean the horse. Trixy Brent gave him to me before he went abroad."

"Gave him to you!" Honora exclaimed.

"Oh, he's always doing kind things like that, and he hadn't any use for him. My dear, I hope you don't think for an instant Trixy's in love with me! He's crazy about Lula Chandos. I tried so hard to get her to come to dinner to-night, and the Trowbridges' and the Barclays'. You've no idea how difficult it is in New York to get any one under two weeks. And so we've got just ourselves."

Honora was on the point of declaring, politely, that she was very glad, when Lily Dallam asked her how she liked the brougham.

"It's the image of Mrs. Cecil Grainger's, my dear, and I got it for a song. As long as Trixy gave me the horse, I told Sid the least he could do was to give me the brougham and the harness. Is Master Sid asleep?" she inquired of the maid who had been patiently waiting at the door. "I meant to have got home in time to kiss him."

She led Honora up the narrow but thickly carpeted stairs to a miniature boudoir, where Madame Adelaide, in a gilt rococo frame, looked superciliously down from the walls.

"Why haven't you been in to see me since my tea, Honora? You were *such* a success, and after you left they were all *crazy* to know something about you, and why they hadn't heard of you. My dear, how much did little Harris charge you for that dress? If I had your face and neck and figure I'd die before I'd live in Rivington. You're positively *wasted*, Honora. And if you stay there, no one will look at you, though you were as beautiful as Mrs. Langtry."

"You're rather good-looking yourself, Lily," said Honora.

"I'm ten years older than you, my dear, and I have to be *so* careful. Sid says I'm killing myself, but I've found a little massage woman who is wonderful. How do you like this dress?"

"All your things are exquisite."

"Do you think so?" cried Mrs. Dallam, delightedly.

Honora, indeed, had not perjured herself. Only the hypercritical, when Mrs. Dallam was dressed, had the impression of a performed miracle. She was the most finished of finished products. Her complexion was high and (be it added) natural, her hair wonderfully onduléd, and she had withal the sweetest and kindest of smiles and the most engaging laughter in the world. It was impossible not to love her.

"Howard," she cried, when a little later they were seated at the table, "how mean of you to have kept Honora in a dead and alive place like Rivington all these years! I think she's an *angel* to have stood it. Men are beyond me. Do you *know* what an attractive wife you've got? I've just been telling her that there wasn't a woman at my tea who compared with her, and the men were crazy about her."

"That's the reason I live down there," proclaimed Howard, as he finished his first glass of champagne.

"Honora," demanded Mrs. Dallam, ignoring his bravado, "why don't you take a house at Quicksands? You'd love it, and you'd look simply divine in a bathing suit. Why *don't* you come down?"

"Ask Howard," replied Honora, demurely.

"Well, Lily, I'll own up I have been considering it a little," that gentleman admitted with gravity. "But I haven't decided anything. There are certain drawbacks —"

"Drawbacks!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallam. "Drawbacks at Quicksands! I'd like to know what they are. Don't be silly, Howard. You get more for your money there than any place I know." Suddenly the light of an inspiration came into her eyes, and she turned to her husband. "Sid, the Alfred Fern house is for rent, isn't it?"

"I think it must be, Lily," replied Mr. Dallam.

"Sometimes I believe I'm losing my mind," declared Mrs. Dallam. "What an imbecile I was not to think of it! It's a *dear*, Honora, not five minutes from the Club, with the sweetest furniture, and they just finished it last fall. It would be positively *wicked* not to take it, Howard. They couldn't have failed more opportunely. I'm sorry for Alfred, but I always thought Louise Fern a little snob. Sid, you must see Alfred down town the first thing in the morning and ask him what's the least he'll rent it for. Tell him I wish to know."

"But — my dear Lily —" began Mr. Dallam apologetically.

"There!" complained his wife, "you're always raising objections to my most charming and sensible plans. You act as though you wanted Honora and Howard to stay in Rivington."

"My dear Lily!" he protested again. And words failing him, he sought by a gesture to disclaim such a sinister motive for inaction.

"What harm can it do?" she asked plaintively. "Howard doesn't *have* to rent the house, although it would be a sin if he didn't. Find out the rent in the morning, Sid, and we'll all four go down on Sunday and look at it, and lunch at the Quicksands Club. I'm sure I can get out of my engagement at Laura Dean's — this is *so* important. What do you say, Honora?"

"I think it would be delightful," said Honora.

CHAPTER V

QUICKSANDS

To convey any adequate idea of the community familiarly known as Quicksands a cinematograph were necessary. With a pen we can only approximate the appearance of the shifting grains at any one time. Some households there were, indeed, which maintained a precarious though seemingly miraculous footing on the surface, or near it, going under for mere brief periods, only to rise again and flaunt men-servants in the face of Providence.

There were real tragedies, too, although a casual visitor would never have guessed it. For tragedies sink, and that is the end of them. The cinematograph, to be sure, would reveal one from time to time, coming like a shadow across an endless feast, and gone again in a flash. Such was what might appropriately be called the episode of the Alfred Ferns. After three years of married life they had come, they had rented; the market had gone up, they had bought and built — upon the sands. The ancient farmhouse which had stood on the site had been torn down as unsuited to a higher civilization, although the great elms which had sheltered it had been left standing, in grave contrast to the twisted cedars and stunted oaks so much in evidence round about.

The Ferns — or rather little Mrs. Fern —had had taste, and the new house reflected it. As an indication of the quality of imagination possessed by the owners, the place was called "The Brackens." There was a long porch on the side of the ocean, but a view of the water was shut off from it by a hedge which, during the successive ownerships of the adjoining property, had attained a height of twelve feet. There was a little toy greenhouse connecting with the porch (an "economy" indulged in when the market had begun to go the wrong way for Mr. Fern). Exile, although unpleasant, was sometimes found necessary at Quicksands, and even effective.

Above all things, however, if one is describing Quicksands, one must not be depressing. That is the unforgiveable sin there. Hence we must touch upon these tragedies lightly.

If, after walking through the entrance in the hedge that separated the Brackens from the main road, you turned to the left and followed a driveway newly laid out between young poplars, you came to a mass of cedars. Behind these was hidden the stable. There were four stalls, all replete with brass trimmings, and a box, and the carriage-house was made large enough for the break which Mr. Fern had been getting ready to buy when he had been forced, so unexpectedly, to change his mind.

If the world had been searched, perhaps, no greater contrast to Rivington could have been found than this delightful colony of Quicksands, full of life and motion and colour, where everybody was beautifully dressed and enjoying themselves. For a whole week after her instalment Honora was in a continual state of excitement and anticipation, and the sound of wheels and voices on the highroad beyond the hedge sent her peeping to her curtains a dozen times a day. The waking hours, instead of burdens, were so many fleeting joys. In the morning she awoke to breathe a new, perplexing, and delicious perfume — the salt sea breeze stirring her curtains: later, she was on the gay, yellow-ochre beach with Lily Dallam, making new acquaintances; and presently stepping, with a quiver of fear akin to delight, into the restless, limitless blue water that stretched southward under a milky haze: luncheon somewhere, more new acquaintances, and then, perhaps, in Lily's light wood victoria to meet the train of trains. For at half-past five the little station, forlorn all day long in the midst of the twisted cedars that grew out of the heated sand, assumed an air of gayety and animation. Vehicles of all sorts drew up in the open space before it, wagonettes, phaëtons, victorias, high wheeled hackney carts, and low Hempstead carts: women in white summer gowns and veils compared notes, or shouted invitations to dinner from carriage to carriage. The engine rolled in with a great cloud of dust, the horses danced, the husbands and the overnight guests, grimy and brandishing evening newspapers, poured out of the special car where they had sat in arm-chairs and talked stocks all the way from Long Island City. Some were driven home, it is true; some to the beach, and others to the Quicksands Club, where they continued their discussions over whiskey-and-sodas until it was time to have a cocktail and dress for dinner.

Then came the memorable evening when Lily Dallam gave a dinner in honour of Honora, her real introduction to Quicksands. It was characteristic of Lily that her touch made the desert bloom. Three years before Quicksands had gasped to hear that the Sidney Dallams had bought the Faraday house — or rather what remained of it.

"We got it for nothing," Lily explained triumphantly on the occasion of Honora's first admiring view. "Nobody would *look* at it, my dear."

It must have been this first price, undoubtedly, that appealed to Sidney Dallam, model for all husbands: to Sidney, who had had as much of an idea of buying in Quicksands as of acquiring a Scotch shooting box. The "Faraday place" had belonged to the middle ages, as time is reckoned in Quicksands, and had lain deserted for years, chiefly on account of its lugubrious and funereal aspect. It was on a corner. Two "for rent" signs had fallen successively from the overgrown hedge: some fifty feet back from the road, hidden by undergrowth and in the tenebrous shades of huge larches and cedars, stood a hideous, two-storied house with a mansard roof, once painted dark red.

The magical transformation of all this into a sunny, smiling, white villa with red-striped awnings and well-kept lawns and just enough shade had done no little towards giving to Lily Dallam that ascendency which she had acquired with such startling rapidity in the community. When Honora and Howard drove up to the door in the deepening twilight, every window was a yellow, blazing square, and above the sound of voices rose a waltz from "Lady Emmeline" played with vigour on the piano. Lily Dallam greeted Honora in the little room which (for some unexplained reason) was known as the library, pressed into service at dinner parties as the ladies' dressing room.

"My dear, how sweet you look in that coral! I've been so lucky to-night," she added in Honora's ear; "I've actually got Trixy Brent for you."

Our heroine was conscious of a pleasurable palpitation as she walked with her hostess across the little entry to the door of the drawing-room, where her eyes encountered an inviting and vivacious scene. Some ten or a dozen guests, laughing and talking gayly, filled the spaces between the furniture; an upright piano was embedded in a corner, and the lady who had just executed the waltz had swung around on the stool, and was smiling up at a man who stood beside her with his hand in his pocket. She was a decided brunette, neither tall nor short, with a suggestion of plumpness.

"That's Lula Chandos," explained Lily Dallam in her usual staccato, following Honora's gaze, "at the piano, in ashes of roses. She's stopped mourning for her husband. Trixy told her to-night she'd discarded the sackcloth and kept the ashes. He's awfully clever. I don't wonder that she's crazy about him, do you? He's standing beside her."

Honora took a good look at the famous Trixy, who resembled a certain type of military Englishman. He had close-cropped hair and a close-cropped mustache; and his grey eyes, as they rested amusedly on Mrs. Chandos, seemed to have in them the light of mockery.

"Trixy!" cried his hostess, threading her way with considerable skill across the room and dragging Honora after her, "Trixy, I want to introduce you to Mrs. Spence. Now aren't you glad you came!"

It was partly, no doubt, by such informal introductions that Lily Dallam had made her reputation as the mistress of a house where one and all had such a good time. Honora, of course, blushed to her temples, and everybody laughed — even Mrs. Chandos.

"Glad," said Mr. Brent, with his eyes on Honora, "does not quite express it. You usually have a supply of superlatives, Lily, which you might have drawn on."

"Isn't he irrepressible?" demanded Lily Dallam, delightedly, "he's always teasing."

It was running through Honora's mind, while Lily Dallam's characteristic introductions of the other guests were in progress, that "irrepressible" was an inaccurate word to apply to Mr. Brent's manner. Honora could not define his attitude, but she vaguely resented it. All of Lily's guests had the air of being at home, and at that moment a young gentleman named Charley Goodwin, who was six feet tall and weighed two hundred pounds, was loudly demanding cocktails. They were presently brought by a rather harassed-looking man-servant.

"I can't get over how well you look in that gown, Lula," declared Mrs. Dallam, as they went out to dinner. "Trixy, what does she remind you of?"

"Cleopatra," cried Warry Trowbridge, with an attempt to be gallant.

"Eternal vigilance," said Mr. Brent, and they sat down amidst the laughter, Lily Dallam declaring that he was horrid, and Mrs. Chandos giving him a look of tender reproach. But he turned abruptly to Honora, who was on his other side.

"Where did you drop down from, Mrs. Spence?" he inquired.

"Why do you take it for granted that I have dropped?" she asked sweetly.

He looked at her queerly for a moment, and then burst out laughing.

"Because you are sitting next to Lucifer," he said. "It's kind of me to warn you, isn't it?"

"It wasn't necessary," replied Honora. "And besides, as a dinner companion, I imagine Lucifer couldn't be improved on."

He laughed again.

"As a dinner companion!" he repeated. "So you would limit Lucifer to dinners? That's rather a severe punishment, since we're neighbours."

"How delightful to have Lucifer as one's neighbour," said Honora, avoiding his eyes. "Of course I've been brought up to believe that he was always next door, so to speak, but I've never had any proof of it until now."

"Proof!" echoed Mr. Brent. "Has my reputation gone before me?"

"I smell the brimstone," said Honora.

He derived, apparently, infinite amusement from this remark likewise.

"If I had known I was to have the honour of sitting here, I should have used another perfume," he replied. "I have several."

It was Honora's turn to laugh.

"They are probably for — commercial transactions, not for ladies," she retorted. "We are notoriously fond of brimstone, if it is not too strong. A suspicion of it."

Her colour was high, and she was surprised at her own vivacity. It seemed strange that she should be holding her own in this manner with the renowned Trixton Brent. No wonder, after four years of Rivington, that she tingled with an unwonted excitement.

At this point Mr. Brent's eye fell upon Howard, who was explaining something to Mrs. Trowbridge at the far end of the table.

"What's your husband like?" he demanded abruptly.

Honora was a little taken aback, but recovered sufficiently to retort: —

"You'd hardly expect me to give you an unprejudiced judgment."

"That's true," he agreed significantly.

"He's everything," added Honora, "that is to be expected in a husband."

"Which isn't much, in these days," declared Mr. Brent.

"On the contrary," said Honora.

"What I should like to know is why you came to Quicksands," said Mr. Brent.

"For a little excitement," she replied. "So far, I have not been disappointed. But why do you ask that question?" she demanded, with a slight uneasiness. "Why did you come here?"

"Oh," he said, "you must remember that I'm — Lucifer, a citizen of the world, at home anywhere, a sort of freebooter. I'm not here all the time — but that's no reflection on Quicksands. May I make a bet with you, Mrs. Spence?"

"What about?"

"That you won't stay in Quicksands more than six months," he answered.

"Why do you say that?" she asked curiously.

He shook his head.

"My experience with your sex," he declared enigmatically, "has not been a slight one."

"Trixy!" interrupted Mrs. Chandos at this juncture, from his other side, "Warry Trowbridge won't tell me whether to sell my Consolidated Potteries stock."

"Because he doesn't know," said Mr. Brent, laconically, and readdressed himself to Honora, who had, however, caught a glimpse of Mrs. Chandos' face.

"Don't you think it's time for you to talk to Mrs. Chandos?" she asked.

"What for?"

"Well, for one reason, it is customary, out of consideration for the hostess, to assist in turning the table."

"Lily doesn't care," he said.

"How about Mrs. Chandos? I have an idea that she does care."

He made a gesture of indifference.

"And how about me?" Honora continued. "Perhaps — I'd like to talk to Mr. Dallam."

"Have you ever tried it?" he demanded.

Over her shoulder she flashed back at him a glance which he did not return. She had never, to tell the truth, given her husband's partner much consideration. He had existed in her mind solely as an obliging shopkeeper with whom Lily had unlimited credit, and who handed her over the counter such things as she desired. And to-night, in contrast to Trixton Brent, Sidney Dallam suggested the counter more than ever before. He was about five and forty, small, neatly made, with little hands and feet; fast growing bald, and what hair remained to him was a jet black. His suavity of manner and anxious desire to give one just the topic that pleased had always irritated Honora.

Good shopkeepers are not supposed to have any tastes, predilections, or desires of their own, and it was therefore with no little surprise that, after many haphazard attempts, Honora discovered Mr. Dallam to be possessed by one all-absorbing weakness. She had fallen in love, she remarked, with little Sid on the beach, and Sidney Dallam suddenly became transfigured. Was she fond of children? Honora coloured a little, and said "yes." He confided to her, with an astonishing degree of feeling, that it had been the regret of his life he had not had more children. Nobody, he implied, who came to his house had ever exhibited the proper interest in Sid.

"Sometimes," he said, leaning towards her confidentially, "I slip upstairs for a little peep at him after dinner."

"Oh," cried Honora, "if you're going to-night mayn't I go with you? I'd love to see him in bed."

"Of course I'll take you," said Sidney Dallam, and he looked at her so gratefully that she coloured again.

"Honora," said Lily Dallam, when the women were back in the drawing-room, "what did you do to Sid? You had him beaming — and he hates dinner parties."

"We were talking about children," replied Honora, innocently.

"Children!"

"Yes," said Honora, "and your husband has promised to take me up to the nursery."

"And did you talk to Trixy about children, too?" cried Lily, laughing, with a mischievous glance at Mrs. Chandos.

"Is he interested in them?" asked Honora.

"You *dear!*" cried Lily, "you'll be the death of me. Lula, Honora wants to know whether Trixy is interested in children."

Mrs. Chandos, in the act of lighting a cigarette, smiled sweetly.

"Apparently he is," she said.

"It's time he were, if he's ever going to be," said Honora, just as sweetly.

Everybody laughed but Mrs. Chandos, who began to betray an intense interest in some old lace in the corner of the room.

"I bought it for nothing, my dear," said Mrs. Dallam, but she pinched Honora's arm delightedly. "How wicked of you!" she whispered, "but it serves her right."

In the midst of the discussion of clothes and house rents and other people's possessions, interspersed with anecdotes of a kind that was new to Honora, Sidney Dallam appeared at the door and beckoned to her.

"How silly of you, Sid!" exclaimed his wife; "of course she doesn't want to go."

"Indeed I do," protested Honora, rising with alacrity and following her host up the stairs. At the end of a hallway a nurse, who had been reading beside a lamp, got up smilingly and led the way on tiptoe into the nursery, turning on a shaded electric light. Honora bent over the crib. The child lay, as children will, with his little yellow head resting on his arm. But in a moment, as she stood gazing at him, he turned and opened his eyes and smiled at her, and she stooped and kissed him.

"Where's Daddy?" he demanded.

"We've waked him!" said Honora, remorsefully.

"Daddy," said the child, "tell me a story."

The nurse looked at Dallam reproachfully, as her duty demanded, and yet she smiled. The noise of laughter reached them from below.

"I didn't have any to-night," the child pleaded.

"I got home late," Dallam explained to Honora, and, looking at the nurse, pleaded in his turn; "just one."

"Just a tiny one," said the child.

"It's against all rules, Mr. Dallam," said the nurse, "but — he's been very lonesome to-day."

Dallam sat down on one side of him, Honora on the other.

"Will you go to sleep right away if I do, Sid?" he asked.

The child shut his eyes very tight.

"Like that," he promised.

It was not the Sidney Dallam of the counting-room who told that story, and Honora listened with strange sensations which she did not attempt to define.

"I used to be fond of that one when I was a youngster," he explained apologetically to her as they went out, and little Sid had settled himself obediently on the pillow once more. "It was when I dreamed," he added, "of less prosaic occupations than the stock market."

Sidney Dallam had dreamed!

Although Lily Dallam had declared that to leave her house before midnight was to insult her, it was half-past eleven when Honora and her husband reached home. He halted smilingly in her doorway as she took off her wrap and laid it over a chair.

"Well, Honora," he asked, "how do you like — the whirl of fashion?"

She turned to him with one of those rapid and bewildering movements that sometimes characterized her, and put her arms on his shoulders.

"What a dear old stay-at-home you were, Howard," she said. "I wonder what would have happened to you if I hadn't rescued you in the nick of time! Own up that you like — a little variety in life."

Being a man, he qualified his approval.

"I didn't have a bad time," he admitted. "I had a talk with Brent after dinner, and I think I've got him interested in a little scheme. It's a strange thing that Sid Dallam was never able to do any business with him. If I can put this through, coming to Quicksands will have been worth while." He paused a moment, and added: "Brent seems to have taken quite a shine to you, Honora."

She dropped her arms, and going over to her dressing table, unclasped a pin on the front of her gown.

"I imagine," she answered, in an indifferent tone, "that he acts so with every new woman he meets."

Howard remained for a while in the doorway, seemingly about to speak. Then he turned on his heel, and she heard him go into his own room.

Far into the night she lay awake, the various incidents of the evening, like magic lantern views, thrown with bewildering rapidity on the screen of her mind. At last she was launched into life, and the days of her isolation gone by forever. She was in the centre of things. And yet — well, nothing could be perfect. Perhaps she demanded too much. Once or twice, in the intimate and somewhat uproarious badinage that had been tossed back and forth in the drawing-room after dinner, her delicacy had been offended: an air of revelry had prevailed, enhanced by the arrival of whiskey-and-soda on a tray. And at the time she had been caught up by an excitement in the grip of which she still found herself. She had been aware, as she tried to talk to Warren Trowbridge, of Trixton Brent's glance, and of a certain hostility from Mrs. Chandos that caused her now to grow warm with a kind of shame when she thought of it. But she could not deny that this man had for her a fascination. There was in him an insolent sense of power, of scarcely veiled contempt for the company in which he found himself. And she asked herself, in this mood of introspection, whether a little of his contempt for Lily Dallam's guests had not been communicated from him to her.

When she had risen to leave, he had followed her into the entry. She recalled him vividly as he had stood before her then, a cigar in one hand and a lighted match in the other, his eyes fixed upon her with a singularly disquieting look that was tinged, however, with amusement.

"I'm coming to see you," he announced.

"Do be careful," she had cried, "you'll burn yourself!"

"That," he answered, tossing away the match, "is to be expected."

She laughed nervously.

"Good night," he added, "and remember my bet."

What could he have meant when he had declared that she would not remain in Quicksands?

CHAPTER VI

GAD AND MENI

There was an orthodox place of worship at Quicksands, a temple not merely opened up for an hour or so on Sunday mornings to be shut tight during the remainder of the week although it was thronged with devotees on the Sabbath. This temple, of course, was the Quicksands Club. Howard Spence was quite orthodox; and, like some of our Puritan forefathers, did not even come home to the midday meal on the first day of the week. But a certain instinct of protest and of nonconformity which may have been remarked in our heroine sent her to St. Andrews-by-the-Sea — by no means so well attended as the house of Gad and Meni. She walked home in a pleasantly contemplative state of mind through a field of daisies, and had just arrived at the hedge in front of the Brackens when the sound of hoofs behind her caused her to turn. Mr. Trixton Brent, very firmly astride of a restive, flea-bitten polo pony, surveyed her amusedly.

"Where have you been?" said he.

"To church," replied Honora, demurely.

"Such virtue is unheard of in Quicksands."

"It isn't virtue," said Honora.

"I had my doubts about that, too," he declared.

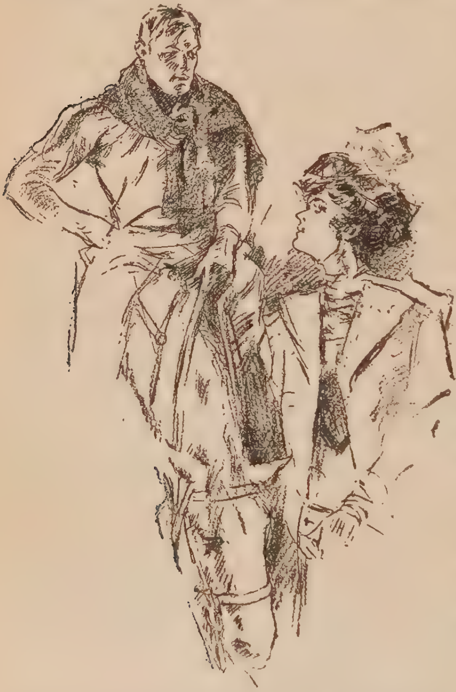
"What is it, then?" she asked laughingly, wondering why he had such a faculty of stirring her excitement and interest.

"Dissatisfaction," was his prompt reply.

"I don't see why you say that," she protested.

"I'm prepared to make my wager definite," said he. "The odds are a thoroughbred horse against a personally knitted worsted waistcoat that you won't stay in Quicksands six months."

"I wish you wouldn't talk nonsense," said Honora, "and besides, I can't knit."



There was a short silence during which he didn't relax his disconcerting stare.

"Won't you come in?" she asked. "I'm sorry Howard isn't home."

"I'm not," he said promptly. "Can't you come over to my box for lunch? I've asked Lula Chandos and Warry Trowbridge."

It was not without appropriateness that Trixton Brent called his house the "Box." It was square, with no pretensions to architecture whatever, with a porch running all the way around it. And it was literally filled with the relics of the man's physical prowess: cups for games of all descriptions, heads and skins from the Bitter Roots to Bengal, and masks and brushes from England. To Honora there was an irresistible and mysterious fascination in all these trophies, each suggesting a finished — and some perhaps a cruel — performance of the man himself. The cups were polished until they beat back the light like mirrors, and the glossy bear and tiger skins gave no hint of dying agonies.

Mr. Brent's method with women, Honora observed, more resembled the noble sport of Isaac Walton than that of Nimrod, but she could not deny that this element of cruelty was one of his fascinations. It was very evident to a feminine observer, for instance, that Mrs. Chandos was engaged in a breathless and altogether desperate struggle with the slow but inevitable and appalling Nemesis of a body and character that would not harmonize. If her figure grew stout, what was to become of her charm as an enfant gâté? Her host not only perceived, but apparently derived great enjoyment out of the drama of this contest. From self-indulgence to self-denial — even though inspired by terror — is a far cry. And Trixton Brent had evidently prepared his menu with a satanic purpose.

"What! No entrée, Lula? I had that sauce especially for you."

"Oh, Trixy, did you really? How sweet of you!" And her liquid eyes regarded, with an almost equal affection, first the master and then the dish. "I'll take a little," she said weakly; "it's so bad for my gout."

"What," asked Trixton Brent, flashing an amused glance at Honora, "are the symptoms of gout, Lula? I hear a great deal about that trouble these days, but it seems to affect every one differently."

Mrs. Chandos grew very red, but Warry Trowbridge saved her.

"It's a swelling," he said innocently.

Brent threw back his head and laughed.

"You haven't got it anyway, Warry," he cried.

Mr. Trowbridge, who resembled a lean and greying Irish terrier, maintained that he had.

"It's a pity you don't ride, Lula. I understand that that's one of the best preventives — for gout. I bought a horse last week that would just suit you — an ideal woman's horse. He's taken a couple of blue ribbons this summer."

"I hope you will show him to us, Mr. Brent," exclaimed Honora, in a spirit of kindness.

"Do you ride?" he demanded.

"I'm devoted to it," she declared.

It was true. For many weeks that spring, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings, she had gone up from Rivington to Harvey's Riding Academy, near Central Park. Thus she had acquired the elements of the equestrian art, and incidentally aroused the enthusiasm of a riding-master.

After Mrs. Chandos had smoked three of the cigarettes which her host specially imported from Egypt, she declared, with no superabundance of enthusiasm, that she was ready "to go and see what Trixy had in the stables." In spite of that lady's somewhat obvious impatience, Honora insisted upon admiring everything from the monogram of coloured sands so deftly woven on the white in the coach house, to the hunters and polo ponies in their rows of boxes. At last Vercingetorix, the latest acquisition of which Brent had spoken, was uncovered and trotted around the ring.

"I'm sorry, Trixy, but I've really got to leave," said Mrs. Chandos. "And I'm in such a predicament! I promised Fanny Darlington I'd go over there, and it's eight miles, and both my horses are lame."

Brent turned to his coachman.

"Put a pair in the victoria right away and drive Mrs. Chandos to Mrs. Darlington's," he said.

She looked at him, and her lip quivered.

"You always were the soul of generosity, Trixy, but — why the victoria?"

"My dear Lula," he replied, "if there's any other carriage you prefer — ?"

Honora did not hear the answer, which at any rate was scarcely audible. She moved away, and her eyes continued to follow Vercingetorix as he trotted about the tan-bark after a groom. And presently she was aware that Trixton Brent was standing beside her.

"What do you think of him?" he asked.

"He's adorable," declared Honora.

"Would you like to try him?"

"Oh — might I? Sometime?"

"Why not to-day — now?" he said. "I'll send him over to your house and have your saddle put on him."

Before Honora could protest Mrs. Chandos came forward.

"It's awfully sweet of you, Trixy, to offer to send me to Fanny's, but Warry says he will *drive* me over. Good-by, my dear," she added, holding out her hand to Honora. "I hope you enjoy your ride."

Mr. Trowbridge's phaëton was brought up, Brent helped Mrs. Chandos in, and stood for a moment gazing after her. Amusement was still in his eyes as he turned to Honora.

"Poor Lula!" he said. "Most women could have done it better than that — couldn't they?"

"I think you were horrid to her," exclaimed Honora, indignantly. "It wouldn't have hurt you to drive her to Mrs. Darlington's."

It did not occur to her that her rebuke implied a familiarity at which they had swiftly but imperceptibly arrived.

"Oh, yes, it would hurt me," said he. "I'd rather spend a day in jail than drive with Lula in that frame of mind. Tender reproaches, and all that sort of thing, you know — although I can't believe you ever indulge in them. Don't," he added.

In spite of the fact that she was up in arms for her sex, Honora smiled.

"Do you know," she said slowly, "I'm beginning to think you are a brute."

"That's encouraging," he replied.

"And fickle."

"Still more encouraging. Most men are fickle. We're predatory animals."

"It's just as well that I am warned," said Honora. She raised her parasol and picked up her skirts and shot him a look. Although he did not resemble in feature the great if unscrupulous Emperor of the French, he reminded her now of a picture she had once seen of Napoleon and a lady; the lady obviously in a little flutter under the Emperor's scrutiny. The picture had suggested a probable future for the lady.

"How long will it take you to dress?" he asked.

"To dress for what?"

"To ride with me."

"I'm not going to ride with you," she said, and experienced a tingle of satisfaction from his surprise.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"In the first place, because I don't want to; and in the second, because I'm expecting Lily Dallam."

"Lily never keeps an engagement," he said.

"That's no reason why I shouldn't," Honora answered.

"I'm beginning to think you're deuced clever," said he.

"How unfortunate for me!" she exclaimed.

He laughed, although it was plain that he was obviously put out. Honora was still smiling.

"Deuced clever," he repeated.

"An experienced moth," suggested Honora; "perhaps one that has been singed a little, once or twice. Good-by — I've enjoyed myself immensely."

She glanced back at him as she walked down the path to the roadway. He was still standing where she had left him, his feet slightly apart, his hands in the pockets of his riding breeches, looking after her.

Her announcement of an engagement with Mrs. Dallam had been, to put it politely, fiction. She spent the rest of the afternoon writing letters home, pausing at periods to look out of the window. Occasionally it appeared that her reflections were amusing. At seven o'clock Howard arrived, flushed and tired after his day of rest.

"By the way, Honora, I saw Trixy Brent at the Club, and he said you wouldn't go riding with him."

"Do you call him Trixy to his face?" she asked.

"What? No — but every one calls him Trixy. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," she replied. "Only — the habit every one has in Quicksands of speaking of people they don't know well by their nicknames seems rather bad taste."

"I thought you liked Quicksands," he retorted. "You weren't happy until you got down here."

"It's infinitely better than Rivington," she said.

"I suppose," he remarked, with a little irritation unusual in him, "that you'll be wanting to go to Newport next."

"Perhaps," said Honora, and resumed her letter. He fidgeted about the room for a while, ordered a cocktail, and lighted a cigarette.

"Look here," he began presently, "I wish you'd be decent to Brent. He's a pretty good fellow, and he's in with James Wing and that crowd of big financiers, and he seems to have taken a shine to me — probably because he's heard of that copper deal I put through this spring."

Honora thrust back her writing pad, turned in her chair, and faced him.

"How 'decent' do you wish me to be?" she inquired.

"How decent?" he repeated.

"Yes."

He regarded her uneasily, took the cocktail which the maid offered him, drank it, and laid down the glass.

He had had before, in the presence of his wife, this vague feeling of having passed boundaries invisible to him. In her eyes was a curious smile that lacked mirth, in her voice a dispassionate note that added to his bewilderment.

"What do you mean, Honora?"

"I know it's too much to expect of a man to be as solicitous about his wife as he is about his business," she replied. "Otherwise he would hesitate before he threw her into the arms of Mr. Trixton Brent. I warn you that he is very attractive to women."

"Hang it," said Howard, "I can't see what you're driving at. I'm not throwing you into his arms. I'm merely asking you to be friendly with him. It means a good deal to me — to both of us. And besides, you can take care of yourself. You're not the sort of woman to play the fool."

"One never can tell," said Honora, "what may happen. Suppose I fell in love with him?"

"Don't talk nonsense," he said.

"I'm not so sure," she answered, meditatively, "that it is nonsense. It would be quite easy to fall in love with him.

Easier than you imagine. Would you care?" she added curiously.

"Care!" he cried; "of course I'd care. What kind of rot are you talking?"

"Why would you care?"

"Why? What a darned idiotic question!"

"It's not really so idiotic as you think it is," she said. "Suppose I allowed Mr. Brent to make love to me, as he's very willing to do, would you be sufficiently interested to compete?"

"To what?"

"To compete."

"But — but we're married."

She laid her hand upon her knee and glanced down at it.

"It never occurred to me until lately," she said, "how absurd is the belief men still hold in these days that a wedding-ring absolves them forever from any effort on their part to retain their wives' affections. They regard the ring very much as a ball and chain, or a hobble to prevent the women from running away, that they may catch them whenever they may desire — which isn't often. Am I not right?"

He snapped his cigarette case.

"Darn it, Honora, you're getting too deep for me!" he exclaimed. "You never liked those Browning women down at Rivington, but if this isn't Browning I'm hanged if I know what it is. An attack of nerves, perhaps. They tell me that women go all to pieces nowadays over nothing at all."

"That's just it," she agreed, "nothing at all!"

"I thought as much," he replied, eager to seize this opportunity of ending a conversation that had neither head nor tail, and yet was marvellously uncomfortable. "There! be a good girl, and forget it."

He stooped down suddenly to kiss her, but she turned her face in time to receive the caress on the cheek.

"The panacea!" she said.

He laughed a little, boyishly, as he stood looking down at her.

"Sometimes I can't make you out," he said. "You've changed a good deal since I married you."

She was silent. But the thought occurred to her that a complete absorption in commercialism was not developing.

"If you can manage it, Honora," he added with an attempt at lightness, "I wish you'd have a little dinner soon, and ask Brent. Will you?"

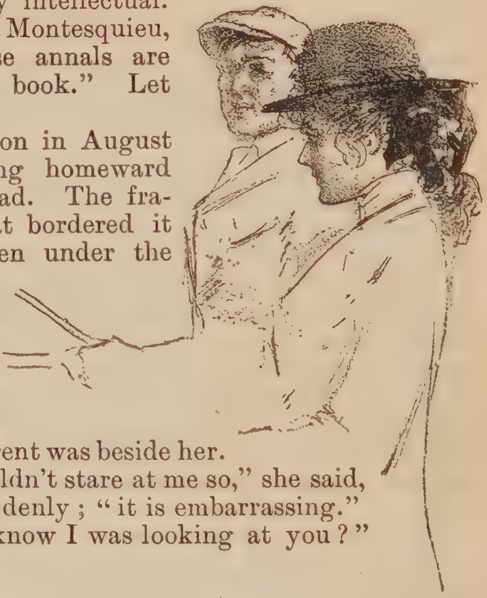
"Nothing," she replied, "would give me greater pleasure."

He patted her on the shoulder and left the room whistling. But she sat where she was until the maid came in to pull the curtains and turn on the lights, reminding her that guests were expected.

Although the circle of Mr. Brent's friends could not be said to include any university or college presidents, it was, however, both catholic and wide. He was hail fellow, indeed, with jockeys and financiers, great ladies and municipal statesmen of good Irish stock. He was a lion who roamed at large over a great variety of hunting grounds, some of which it would be snobbish to mention; for many reasons he preferred Quicksands: a man-eater, a woman-eater, and extraordinarily popular, nevertheless. Many ladies, so it was reported, had tried to tame him: some of them he had cheerfully gobbled up, and others after the briefest of inspections, disdainfully thrust aside with his paw.

This instinct for lion taming, which the most spirited of women possess, is, by the way, almost inexplicable to the great majority of the male sex. Honora had it, as must have been guessed. But however our faith in her may be justified by the ridiculous ease of her previous conquests, we cannot regard without trepidation her entrance into the arena with this particular and widely renowned king of beasts. Innocence pitted against sophistry and wile and might.

Two of the preliminary contests we have already witnessed. Others, more or less similar, followed during a period of two months or more. Nothing inducing the excessive wagging of tongues, — Honora saw to that, although Mrs. Chandos kindly took the trouble to warn our heroine, — a scene for which there is unfortunately no space in this chronicle; an entirely amicable, almost honeyed scene, in Honora's boudoir. Nor can a complete picture of life at Quicksands be undertaken. Multiply Mrs. Dallam's dinner-party by one hundred, Howard Spence's Sundays at the Club by twenty, and one has a very fair idea of it. It was not precisely intellectual. "Happy," says Montesquieu, "the people whose annals are blank in history's book." Let us leave it at that.



Late one afternoon in August Honora was riding homeward along the ocean road. The fragrant marshes that bordered it were a vivid green under the slanting rays of the sun, and she was gazing across them at the breakers crashing on the beach beyond. Trixton Brent was beside her.

"I wish you wouldn't stare at me so," she said, turning to him suddenly; "it is embarrassing."

"How did you know I was looking at you?" he asked.

"I felt it."

He drew his horse a little nearer.

"Sometimes you're positively uncanny," she added.

He laughed.

"I rather like that castles-in-Spain expression you wore," he declared.

"Castles in Spain?"

"Or in some other place where the real estate is more valuable. Certainly not in Quicksands."

"You *are* uncanny," proclaimed Honora, with conviction.

"I told you you wouldn't like Quicksands," said he.

"I've never said I didn't like it," she replied. "I can't see why you assume that I don't."

"You're ambitious," he said. "Not that I think it a fault, when it's more or less warranted. You're thrown away here, and you know it."

She made him a bow from the saddle.

"You came here by mistake."

"I have not been without a reward, at least," she answered, and looked at him.

"I have," said he.

Honora smiled.

"I'm going to be your good angel, and help you get out of it," he continued.

"Get out of what?"

"Quicksands."

"Do you think I'm in danger of sinking?" she asked. "And is it impossible for me to get out alone, if I wished to?"

"It will be easier with my help," he answered. "You're clever enough to realize that — Honora."

She was silent awhile.

"You say the most extraordinary things," she remarked presently. "Sometimes I think they are almost — "

"Indelicate," he supplied.

She coloured.

"Yes, indelicate."

"You can't forgive me for sweeping away your rose-coloured cloud of romance," he declared, laughing. "There are spades in the pack, however much you may wish to ignore 'em. You know very well you don't like these Quicksands people. They grate on your finer sensibilities, and all that sort of thing. Come, now, isn't it so?"

She coloured again, and put her horse to the trot.

"Onwards and upwards," he cried. "*Veni, vidi, vici, ascendi.*"

"It seems to me," she laughed, "that so much education is thrown away on the stock market."

"Whether you will be any happier higher up," he went on, "God knows. Sometimes I think you ought to go back to the Arcadia you came from. Did you pick out Spence for an embryo lord of high finance?"

"My excuse is," replied Honora, "that I was very young, and I hadn't met you."

Whether the lion has judged our heroine with astuteness, or done her a little less than justice, must be left to the reader. Apparently he is accepting her gentle lashings with a meek enjoyment. He assisted her to alight at her own door, sent the horses home, and offered to come in and give her a lesson in a delightful game that was to do its share in the disintegration of the old and tiresome order of things — bridge. The lion, it will be seen, was self-sacrificing even to the extent of double dummy. He had picked up the game with characteristic aptitude abroad — Quicksands had yet to learn it.

Howard Spence entered in the midst of the lesson.

"Hello, Brent," said he, genially, "you may be interested to know I got that little matter through without a hitch to-day."

"I continue to marvel at you," said the lion, and made it no trumps.

Since this is a veracious history, and since we have wandered so far from home and amidst such strange, if brilliant scenes, it must be confessed that Honora, three days earlier, had entered a certain shop in New York and inquired for a book on bridge. Yes, said the clerk, he had such a treatise, it had arrived from England a week before. She kept it locked up in her drawer, and studied it in the mornings with a pack of cards before her.

Given the proper amount of spur, anything in reason can be mastered.

CHAPTER VII

OF CERTAIN DELICATE MATTERS

In the religious cult of Gad and Meni, practised with such enthusiasm at Quicksands, the Saints' days were polo days, and the chief of all festivals the occasion of the match with the Banbury Hunt Club—Quicksands's greatest rival. Rival for more reasons than one, reasons too delicate to tell. Long, long ago there appeared in Punch a cartoon of Lord Beaconsfield executing that most difficult of performances, an egg dance. We shall be fortunate indeed if we get to the end of this chapter without breaking an egg!

Our pen fails us in a description of that festival of festivals, the Banbury one, which took place early in September. We should have to go back to Babylon and the days of King Nebuchadnezzar. (Who turns out to have been only a regent, by the way, and his name is now said to be spelled *rezzar*). How give an idea of the libations poured out to Gad and the shekels laid aside for Meni in the Quicksands Temple?

Honora privately thought that building ugly, and it reminded her of a collection of huge yellow fungi sprawling over the ground. A few of the inevitable tortured cedars were around it. Between two of the larger buildings was wedged a room dedicated to the worship of Bacchus, to-day like a narrow river-gorge at flood time jammed with tree-trunks—some of them, let us say, water-logged—and all grinding together with an intolerable noise like a battle. If you happened to be passing the windows, certain more or less intelligible sounds might separate themselves from the bedlam.

"Four to five on Quicksands!"

"That stock isn't worth a d——n!"

"She's gone to South Dakota."

Honora, however, is an heretic, as we know. Without going definitely into her reasons, these festivals had gradually become distasteful to her. Perhaps it would be fairer to look at them through the eyes of Lily Dallam, who was in her element on such days, and regarded them as the most innocent and enjoyable of occasions, and perhaps they were.

The view from the veranda, at least, appealed to our heroine's artistic sense. The marshes in the middle distance, the shimmering sea beyond, and the polo field laid down like a vast green carpet in the foreground; while the players, in white breeches and bright shirts, on the agile little horses that darted hither and thither across the turf lent an added touch of colour and movement to the scene. Amongst them, Trixton Brent most frequently caught the eye and held it. Once Honora perceived him flying the length of the field, madly pursued, his mallet poised lightly, his shirt bulging in the wind, his close-cropped head bereft of a cap, regardless of the havoc and confusion behind him. He played, indeed, with the cocksureness and individuality one might have expected; and Honora, forgetting at moments the disturbing elements by which she was surrounded, followed him with fascination. Occasionally his name rippled from one end of the crowded veranda to the other, and she experienced a curious and uncomfortable sensation when she heard it in the mouths of these strangers.

From time to time she found herself watching them furtively, comparing them unconsciously with her Quicksands friends. Some of them she had remarked before, at contests of a minor importance, and they seemed to her to possess a certain distinction that was indefinable. They had come to-day from many mysterious (and therefore delightful) places which Honora knew only by name, and some had driven the twenty-five odd miles from the hunting community of Banbury in coaches and even those new and marvellous importations — French automobiles. When the game had ended, and Lily Dallam was cajoling the club steward to set her tea-table at once, a group of these visitors halted on the lawn, talking and laughing gayly. Two of the younger men Honora recognized with a start, but for a moment she could not place them — until suddenly she remembered that she had seen them on her wedding trip at Hot Springs. The one who lisped was Mr. Cuthbert, familiarly known as "Toots": the other, taller and slimmer and paler, was Jimmy Wing. A third, the regularity of whose features made one wonder at the perfection which nature could attain when she chose, who had a certain Gallic appearance (and who, if the truth be told, might have reminded an impartial eye of a slightly animated wax clothing model), turned, stared, hesitated, and bowed to Lily Dallam.

"That's Reggie Farwell, who did my house in town," she whispered to Honora. "He's never been *near* me since it was finished. He's utterly ruined."

Honora was silent. She tried not to look at the group, in which there were two women of very attractive appearance, and another man.

"Those people are *so* superior," Mrs. Dallam continued. "I'm not surprised at Elsie Shorter. Ever since she married Jerry she's stuck to the Graingers closer than a sister. That's Cecil Grainger, my dear, — the man who looks as though he were going to fall asleep any moment. But to think of Abby Kame acting that way! Isn't it ridiculous, Clara?" she cried, appealing to Mrs. Trowbridge. "They say that Cecil Grainger never leaves her side. I knew her when she first married John Kame, the dearest, simplest man that ever was. He was twenty years older than Abby, and made his money in leather. She took the first steamer after his funeral and an apartment in a Roman palace for the winter. As soon as she decently could she made for England. The English will put up with anybody who has a few million dollars, and I don't deny that Abby's good-looking, and clever in her way. But it's *absurd* for her to come over here and act as though we didn't exist. She needn't be afraid that I'll speak to her. They say she became intimate with Bessie Grainger through charities. One of your friend Mrs. Holt's charities, by the way, Honora. Where are you going?"

For Honora had risen.

"I think I'll go home, Lily," she said; "I'm rather tired."

"Home!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallam. "What *can* you be thinking of, my dear? Nobody ever goes home after the Banbury match. The fun has just begun, and we're all to stay here for dinner and dance afterwards. And Trixy Brent promised me faithfully he'd come here for tea, as soon as he dressed."

"I really can't stay, Lily. I — I don't feel up to it," said Honora, desperately.

"And you can't know how I counted on you! You look *perfectly* fresh, my dear."

Honora felt an overwhelming desire to hide herself, to be alone. In spite of the cries of protest that followed her and drew — she thought — an unnecessary and disagreeable attention to her departure, she threaded her way among groups of people who stared after her. Her colour was high, her heart beating painfully; a vague sense of rebellion and shame within her for which she did not try to account. Rather than run the gantlet of the crowded veranda she stepped out on the lawn, and there encountered Trixton Brent. He had, in an incredibly brief time, changed from his polo clothes to flannels and a straw hat. He looked at her and whistled, and barred her passage.

"Hel-*lo*!" he cried. "Hoity-toity! Where are we going in such a hurry?"

"Home," answered Honora, a little breathlessly, and added for his deception, "the game's over, isn't it? I'm glad you won."

Mr. Brent, however, continued to gaze at her penetratingly, and she avoided his eyes.

"But why are you rushing off like a flushed partridge?

— no reference to your complexion. Has there been a row?"

"Oh, no — I was just — tired. *Please* let me go."

"Being your good angel — or physician, as you choose — I have a prescription for that kind of weariness," he said smilingly. "I — anticipated such an attack. That's why I got into my clothes in such record time."

"I don't know what you mean," faltered Honora. "You are always imagining all sorts of things about me that aren't true."

"As a matter of fact," said Brent, "I have promised faithfully to do a favor for certain friends of mine who have been clamouring to be presented to you."

"I can't — to-day — Mr. Brent," she cried. "I really don't feel like — meeting people. I told Lily Dallam I was going home."

The group, however, which had been the object of that lady's remarks was already moving towards them — with the exception of Mrs. Shorter and Mr. Farwell, who had left it. They greeted Mr. Brent with great cordiality.

"Mrs. Kame," he said, "let me introduce Mrs. Spence. And Mrs. Spence, Mr. Grainger, Mr. Wing, and Mr. Cuthbert. Mrs. Spence was just going home."

"Home!" echoed Mrs. Kame, "I thought Quicksands people *never* went home after a victory."

"I've scarcely been here long enough," replied Honora, "to have acquired all of the Quicksands habits."

"Oh," said Mrs. Kame, and looked at Honora again. "Wasn't that Mrs. Dallam you were with? I used to know her, years ago, but she doesn't speak to me any more."

"Perhaps she thinks you've forgotten her," said Honora.

"It would be impossible to forget Mrs. Dallam," declared Mrs. Kame.

"So I should have thought," said Honora.

Trixton Brent laughed, and Mrs. Kame, too, after a moment's hesitation. She laid her hand familiarly on Mr. Brent's arm.

"I haven't seen you all summer, Trixy," she said. "I hear you've been here at Quicksands, stewing in that little packing-case of yours. Aren't you coming into our steeplechase at Banbury?"

"I believe you went to school with my sister," said young Mr. Wing.

"Oh, yes," answered Honora, somewhat surprised. "I caught a glimpse of her once, in New York. I hope you will remember me to her."

"And I've seen you before," proclaimed Mr. Cuthbert, "but I can't for the life of me think where."

Honora did not enlighten him.

"I shan't forget, at any rate, Mrs. Spence," said Cecil Grainger, who had not taken his eyes from her, except to blink.

Mrs. Kame saved her the embarrassment of replying.

"Can't we go somewhere and play bridge, Trixy?" she demanded.

"I'd be delighted to offer you the hospitality of my packing-case, as you call it," said Brent, "but the dining-room ceiling fell down Wednesday, and I'm having the others bolstered up as a mere matter of precaution."

"I suppose we couldn't get a fourth, anyway. Neither Jimmy nor Toots plays. It's so stupid of them not to learn."

"Mrs. Spence might help us out," suggested Brent.

"Do you play?" exclaimed Mrs. Kame, in a voice of mixed incredulity and hope.

"Play!" cried Mr. Brent, "she can teach Jerry Shorter or the Duchess of Taunton."

"The Duchess cheats," announced Cecil Grainger. "I caught her at it at Cannes —"

"Indeed, I don't play very well," Honora interrupted him, "and besides —"

"Suppose we go over to Mrs. Spence's house," Trixton Brent suggested. "I'm sure she'd like to have us — wouldn't you, Mrs. Spence?"

"What a brilliant idea, Trixy!" exclaimed Mrs. Kame.

"I should be delighted," said Honora, somewhat weakly. An impulse made her glance toward the veranda, and for a fraction of a second she caught the eye of Lily Dallam, who turned again to Mrs. Chandos.

"I say," said Mr. Cuthbert, "I don't play — but I hope I may come along."

"And me too," chimed in Mr. Wing.

Honora, not free from a certain uneasiness of conscience, led the way to the Brackens, flanked by Mr. Grainger and Mr. Cuthbert. Her frame of mind was not an ideal one for a hostess; she was put out with Trixton Brent, and she could not help wondering whether these people would have made themselves so free with another house. When tea was over, however, and the bridge had begun, her spirits rose; or rather, a new and strange excitement took possession of her that was not wholly due to the novel and revolutionary experience of playing for money — and winning. Her star being in the ascendant, as we may perceive. She had drawn Mrs. Kame for a partner, and the satisfaction and graciousness of that lady visibly grew as the score mounted: even the skill of Trixton Brent could not triumph over the hands which the two ladies held.

In the intervals the talk wandered into regions unfamiliar to Honora, and she had a sense that her own horizon was being enlarged. A new vista, at least, had been cut: possibilities became probabilities. Even when Mrs. Kame chose to ridicule Quicksands Honora was silent, so keenly did she feel the justice of her guest's remarks; and the implication was that Honora did not belong there. When train time arrived and they were about to climb into Trixton Brent's omnibus — for which he had obligingly telephoned — Mrs. Kame took Honora's hand in both her own. Some good thing, after all, could come out of this community — such was the triumphant discovery the lady's manner implied.

"My dear, don't you ever come to Banbury?" she asked. "I'd be so glad to see you. I must get Trixy to drive you over some day for lunch. We've had such a good time, and Cecil didn't fall asleep once. Quite a record. You saved our lives, really."

"Are you going to be in town this winter?" Mr. Grainger inquired.

"I—I suppose so—" replied Honora, for the moment taken aback, "although I haven't decided just where."

"I shall look forward to seeing you," he said.

This hope was expressed even more fervently by Mr. Cuthbert and Mr. Wing, and the whole party waved her a cordial good-by as the carriage turned the circle. Trixton Brent, with his hands in his pockets, stood facing her under the electric light on the porch.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," repeated Honora.

"Nice people," said Mr. Brent, in his peculiar way.

Honora bridled.

"You invited them here," she said. "I must say I think it was rather—presumptuous. And you've got me into no end of trouble with Lily Dallam."

He laughed as he held open the screen door for her.

"I wonder whether a good angel was ever so abused," he said.

"A good angel," she repeated, smiling at him in spite of herself.

"Or knight-errant," he continued, "whichever you choose. You want to get out of Quicksands—I'm trying to make it easy for you. Before you leave you have to arrange some place to go. Before we are off with the old we'd better be on with the new."

"Oh, please don't say such things," she cried, "they're so—so sordid." She looked searchingly into his face. "Do I really seem to you like that?"

Her lip was quivering, and she was still under the influence of the excitement which the visit of these people had brought about.

"No," said Brent, coming very close to her, "no, you don't. That's the extraordinary part of it. The trouble with you, Honora, is that you want something badly—very badly—and you haven't yet found out what it is.

And you won't find out," he added, "until you have tried everything. Therefore am I a good Samaritan, or something like it."

She looked at him with startled eyes, breathing deeply.

"I wonder if that is so!" she said, in a low voice.

"Not until you have had and broken every toy in the shop," he declared. "Out of the mouths of men of the world occasionally issues wisdom. I'm going to help you get the toys. Don't you think I'm kind?"

"And isn't this — philanthropic mood a little new to you?" she asked.

"I thought I had exhausted all novelties," he answered. "Perhaps that's the reason why I enjoy it."

She turned and walked slowly into the drawing-room, halted, and stood staring at the heap of gold and yellow bills that Mr. Grainger had deposited in front of the place where she had sat. Her sensation was akin to sickness. She reached out with a kind of shuddering fascination and touched the gold.

"I think," she said, speaking rather to herself than to Brent, "I'll give it to charity."

"If it is possible to combine a meritorious act with good policy, I should suggest giving it to Mrs. Grainger for the relief of oppressed working girls," he said.

Honora started.

"I wonder why Howard doesn't come!" she exclaimed, looking at the clock.

"Probably because he is holding nothing but full hands and flushes," hazarded Mr. Brent. "Might I propose myself for dinner?"

"When so many people are clamouring for you?" she asked.

"Even so," he said.

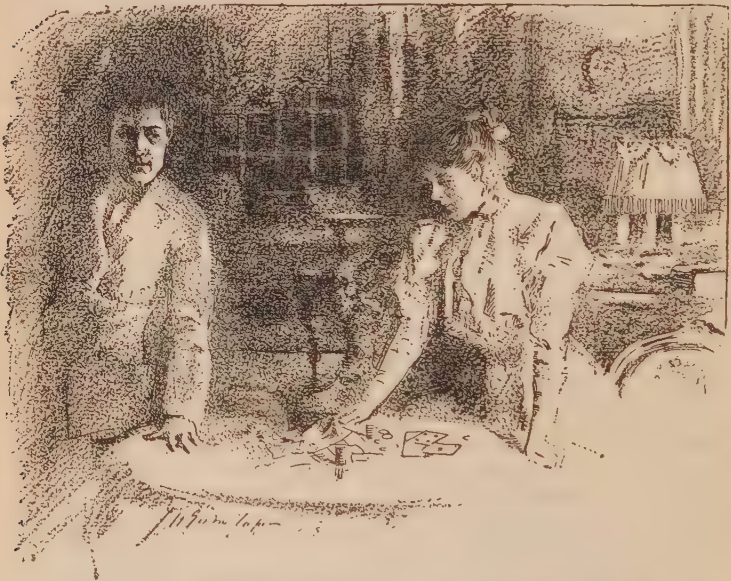
"I think I'll telephone to the Club," said Honora, and left the room.

It was some time before her husband responded to the call; and then he explained that if Honora didn't object, he was going to a man's dinner in a private room. The statement was not unusual.

"But, Howard," she said, "I — I wanted you particularly to-night."

"I thought you were going to dine with Lily Dallam. She told me you were. Are you alone?"

"Mr. Brent is here. He brought over some Banbury people to play bridge. They've gone."



"Oh, Brent will amuse you," he replied. "I didn't know you were going to be home, and I've promised these men. I'll come back early."

She hung up the receiver thoughtfully, paused a moment, and went back to the drawing-room. Brent looked up.

"Well," he said, "was I right?"

"You seem always to be right," Honora sighed.

After dinner they sat in the screened part of the porch which Mrs. Fern had arranged very cleverly as an outside room. Brent had put a rug over Honora's knees, for the ocean breath that stirred the leaves was cold. Across the darkness fragments of dance music drifted fitfully from the Club, and died away; and at intervals, when the embers of his cigar flared up, she caught sight of her companion's face.

She found him difficult to understand. There are certain rules of thumb in every art, no doubt, — even in that most perilous one of lion-taming. But here was a baffling, individual lion. She liked him best, she told herself, when he purred platonically, but she could by no means be sure that his subjection was complete. Sometimes he had scratched her in his play. And however natural it is to desire a lion for one's friend, to be eaten is both uncomfortable and inglorious.

"That's a remarkable husband of yours," he said at length.

"I shouldn't have said that you were a particularly good judge of husbands," she retorted, after a moment of surprise.

He acknowledged with a laugh the justice of this observation.

"I stand corrected. He is by no means a remarkable husband. Permit me to say he is a remarkable man."

"What makes you think so?" asked Honora, considerably disturbed.

"Because he induced you to marry him, for one thing," said Brent. "Of course he got you before you knew what you were worth, but we must give him credit for discovery and foresight."

"Perhaps," Honora could not resist replying, "perhaps he didn't know what he was getting."

"That's probably true," Brent assented, "or he'd be sitting here now, where I am, instead of playing poker. Although there is something in matrimony that takes the bloom off the peach."

"I think that's a horrid, cynical remark," said Honora.

"Well," he said, "we speak according to our experiences — that is, if we're not inclined to be hypocritical. Most women are."

Honora was silent. He had thrown away his cigar, and she could no longer see his face. She wondered whither he was leading.

"How would you like to see your husband president of a trust company?" he said suddenly.

"Howard — president of a trust company?" she exclaimed.

"Why not?" he demanded. And added enigmatically, "Smaller men have been."

"I wish you wouldn't joke about Howard," she said.

"How does the idea strike you?" he persisted. "Ambition satisfied — temporarily; Quicksands a mile-stone on a back road; another toy to break; husband a big man in the community, so far as the eye can see; visiting list on Fifth Avenue, and all that sort of thing."

"I once told you you could be brutal," she said.

"You haven't told me what you thought of the idea."

"I wish you'd be sensible once in a while," she exclaimed.

"Howard Spence, President of the Orange Trust Company," he recited. "I suppose no man is a hero to his wife. Does it sound so incredible?"

It did. But Honora did not say so.

"What have I to do with it?" she asked, in pardonable doubt as to his seriousness.

"Everything," answered Brent. "Women of your type usually have. They make and mar without rhyme or reason — set business by the ears, alter the gold reserve, disturb the balance of trade, and nobody ever suspects it. Old James Wing and I have got a trust company organized, and the building up, and the man Wing wanted for president backed out."

Honora sat up.

"Why — why did he 'back out'?" she demanded.

"He preferred to stay where he was, I suppose," replied Brent, in another tone. "The point is that the place is empty. I'll give it to you."

"To me?"

"Certainly," said Brent, "I don't pretend to care anything about your husband. He'll do as well as the next man. His duties are pretty well — defined."

Again she was silent. But after a moment dropped back in her chair and laughed uneasily.

"You're preposterous," she said; "I can't think why I let you talk to me in this way."

CHAPTER VIII

OF MENTAL PROCESSES — FEMININE AND INSOLUBLE

HONORA may be pardoned for finally ascribing to Mr. Brent's somewhat sardonic sense of humour his remarks concerning her husband's elevation to a conspicuous position in the world of finance. Taken in any other sense than a joke, they were both insulting and degrading, and made her face burn when she thought of them. After he had gone — or rather after she had dismissed him — she took a book upstairs to wait for Howard, but she could not read. At times she wished she had rebuked Trixton Brent more forcibly, although he was not an easy person to rebuke; and again she reflected that, had she taken the matter too seriously, she would have laid herself open to his ridicule. The lion was often unwittingly rough, and perhaps that was part of his fascination.

If Howard had come home before midnight it is possible that she might have tried to sound him as to his relations with Trixton Brent. That gentleman, she remembered, had the reputation of being a peculiarly hard-headed business man, and it was of course absurd that he should offer her husband a position merely to please her. And her imagination failed her when she tried to think of Howard as the president of a trust company. She was unable to picture him in a great executive office.

This train of thought led her to the unaccustomed task of analyzing his character. For the first time since her marriage comparisons crept into her mind, and she awoke to the fact that he was not a masterful man — even among men. For all his self-confidence — self-assurance, perhaps, would be the better word — he was in reality a follower, not a leader; a gleaner. He did not lack ideas. She tried to arrest the process in her brain when she got as far as asking herself whether it might not be that he lacked ideals. Since in business matters he never had taken her into his confidence, and since she would not at any rate have understood such things, she had no proof of such a failing. But one or two vague remarks of Trixton Brent's which she recalled, and Howard's own request that she should be friendly with Brent, reënforced her instinct on this point.

When she heard her husband's footstep on the porch, she put out her light, but still lay thinking in the darkness. Her revelations had arrived at the uncomfortable stage where they began to frighten her, and with an effort she forced herself to turn to the other side of the account. The hour was conducive to exaggerations. Perfection in husbands was evidently a state not to be considered by any woman in her right senses. Hers was more or less amenable, and he was prosperous, although definite news of that prosperity never came from him — Quicksands always knew of it first. An instance of this second-hand acquisition of knowledge occurred the very next morning, when Lily Dallam, with much dignity, walked into Honora's little sitting-room. There was no apparent reason why dignity should not have been becoming to Lily Dallam, for she was by no means an unimpressive-looking woman; but the assumption by her of that quality always made her a little tragic or (if one chanced to be in the humour — Honora was not) a little ridiculous.

"I suppose I have no pride," she said, as she halted within a few feet of the doorway.

"Why, Lily!" exclaimed Honora, pushing back the chair from her desk, and rising.

But Mrs. Dallam did not move.

"I suppose I have no pride," she repeated in a dead voice, "but I just couldn't help coming over and giving you a chance."

"Giving me a chance?" said Honora.

"To explain — after the way you treated me at the polo game. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I shouldn't have believed it. I don't think I should have trusted my own eyes," Mrs. Dallam went so far as to affirm, "if Lula Chandos and Clara Trowbridge and others hadn't been there and seen it too; I shouldn't have believed it."

Honora was finding penitence a little difficult. But her heart was kind.

"Do sit down, Lily," she begged. "If I've offended you in any way, I'm exceedingly sorry — I am, really. You ought to know me well enough to understand that I wouldn't do anything to hurt your feelings."

"And when I counted on you so, for my tea and dinner at the club!" continued Mrs. Dallam. "There were other women dying to come. And you said you had a headache, and were tired."

"I was," began Honora, fruitlessly.

"And you were *so* popular in Quicksands — everybody was crazy about you. You were so sweet and so unspoiled. I might have known that it couldn't last. And now, because Abby Kame and Cecil Grainger and —"

"Lily, please don't say such things!" Honora implored, revolted.

"Of course you won't be satisfied now with anything less than Banbury or Newport. But you can't say I didn't warn you, Honora, that they are a horrid, selfish, fast lot," Lily Dallam declared, and brushed her eyes with her handkerchief. "I *did* love you."

"If you'll only be reasonable a moment, Lily, —" said Honora.

"Reasonable! I saw you with my own eyes. Five minutes after you left me they all started for your house, and Lula Chandos said it was the quickest cure of a headache she had ever seen."

"Lily," Honora began again, with exemplary patience, "when people invite themselves to one's house, it's a little difficult to refuse them hospitality, isn't it?"

"Invite themselves?"

"Yes," replied Honora. "If I weren't — fond of you, too, I shouldn't make this explanation. I *was* tired. I never felt less like entertaining strangers. They wanted to play bridge, there wasn't a quiet spot in the Club where they could go. They knew I was on my way home, and they suggested my house. That is how it happened."

Mrs. Dallam was silent a moment.

"May I have one of Howard's cigarettes?" she asked, and added, after this modest wish had been supplied, "that's just like them. They're willing to make use of anybody."

"I meant," said Honora, "to have gone to your house this morning and to have explained how it happened."

Another brief silence, broken by Lily Dallam.

"Did you notice the skirt of that suit Abby Kame had on?" she asked. "I'm sure she paid a fabulous price for it in Paris, and it's *exactly* like one I ordered on Tuesday."

The details of the rest of this conversation may be omitted. That Honora was forgiven, and Mrs. Dallam's spirits restored may be inferred from her final remark.

"My dear, what *do* you think of Sid and Howard making twenty thousand dollars apiece in Sassafras Copper? Isn't it too lovely! I'm having a little architect make me plans for a conservatory. You know I've always been dying for one — I don't see how I've lived all these years without it."

Honora, after her friend had gone, sat down in one of the wicker chairs on the porch. She had a very vague idea as to how much twenty thousand dollars was, but she reflected that while they had lived in Rivington Howard must have made many similar sums, of which she was unaware. Gradually she began to realize, however, that her resentment of the lack of confidence of her husband was by no means the only cause of the feeling that took possession of and overwhelmed her. Something like it she had experienced before: to-day her thoughts seemed to run through her in pulsations, like waves of heat, and she wondered that she could have controlled herself while listening to Lily Dallam.

Mrs. Dallam's reproaches presented themselves to Honora in new aspects. She began to feel now, with an intensity that frightened her, distaste and rebellion. It was intolerable that she should be called to account for the people she chose to have in her house, that any sort of pressure should be brought to bear on her to confine her friends to Quicksands. Treason, heresy, disloyalty to the cult of that community — in reality these, and not a breach of engagement, were the things of which she had been accused. She saw now. She would not be tied to Quicksands — she would not, she would not, she would not! She owed it no allegiance. Her very soul rebelled at the thought, and cried out that she was made for something better, something higher than the life she had been leading. She would permit no one forcibly to restrict her horizon.

Just where and how this higher and better life was to be found Honora did not know; but the belief of her childhood — that it existed somewhere — was still intact. Her powers of analysis, we see, are only just budding, and she did not and could not define the ideal existence which she so unflaggingly sought. Of two of its attributes only she was sure — that it was to be free from restraint and from odious comparisons. Honora's development, it may be remarked, proceeds by the action of irritants, and of late her protest against Quicksands and what it represented had driven her to other books besides the treatise on bridge. The library she had collected at Rivington she had brought with her, and was adding to it from time to time. Its volumes are neither sufficiently extensive or profound to enumerate.

Those who are more or less skilled in psychology may attempt to establish a sequence between the events and reflections just related and the fact that, one morning a fortnight later, Honora found herself driving northward on Fifth Avenue in a hansom cab. She was in a pleasurable state of adventurous excitement, comparable to that Columbus must have felt when the shores of the Old World had disappeared below the horizon. During the fortnight we have skipped Honora had been to town several times, and had driven and walked through certain streets: inspiration, courage, and decision had all arrived at once this morning, when at the ferry she had given the cabman this particular address on Fifth Avenue.

The cab, with the jerking and thumping peculiar to hansoms, made a circle and drew up at the curb. But even then a moment of irresolution intervened, and she sat staring through the little side window at the sign, *T. Gerald Shorter, Real Estate*, in neat gold letters over the basement floor of the building.

"Here y'are, Miss," said the cabman through the hole in the roof.

Honora descended, and was almost at the flight of steps leading down to the office door when a familiar figure appeared coming out of it. It was that of Mr. Toots Cuthbert, arrayed in a faultless morning suit, his tie delicately suggestive of falling leaves; and there dangled over his arm the slenderest of walking sticks.

"Mrs. Spence!" he lisped, with every appearance of joy.

"Mr. Cuthbert!" she cried.

"Going in to see Jerry?" he inquired after he had put on his hat, nodding up at the sign.

"I — that is, yes, I had thought of it," she answered.

"Town house?" said Mr. Cuthbert, with a knowing smile.

"I did have an idea of looking at houses," she confessed, somewhat taken aback.

"I'm your man," announced Mr. Cuthbert.

"You!" exclaimed Honora, with an air of considering the lilies of the field. But he did not seem to take offence.

"That's my business," he proclaimed, — "when in town. Jerry gives me a commission. Come in and see him, while I get a list and some keys. By the way, you wouldn't object to telling him you were a friend of mine, would you?"

"Not at all," said Honora, laughing.

Mr. Shorter was a jovial gentleman in loose-fitting clothes, and he was exceedingly glad to meet Mr. Cuthbert's friend.

"What kind of a house do you want, Mrs. Spence?" he asked. "Cuthbert tells me this morning that the Whitworth house has come into the market. You couldn't have a better location than that, on the Avenue between the Cathedral and the Park."

"Oh," said Honora with a gasp, "that's much too expensive, I'm sure. And there are only two of us." She hesitated, a little alarmed at the rapidity with which affairs were proceeding, and added: "I ought to tell you that I've not really decided to take a house. I wished to — to see what there was to be had, and then I should have to consult my husband."

She gazed very seriously into Mr. Shorter's brown eyes, which became very wide and serious, too. But all the time it seemed to her that other parts of him were laughing.

"Husbands," he declared, "are kill-joys. What have they got to do with a house — except to sleep in it? Now I haven't the pleasure of knowing you as well as I hope to one of these days, Mrs. Spence —"

"Oh, I say!" interrupted Mr. Cuthbert.

"But I venture to predict, on a slight acquaintance," continued Mr. Shorter, undisturbed, "that you will pick out the house you want, and that your husband will move into it."

Honora could not help laughing. And Mr. Shorter leaned back in his revolving chair and laughed, too, in so alarming a manner as to lead her to fear he would fall over backwards. But Mr. Cuthbert, who did not appear to perceive the humour in this conversation, extracted some keys and several pasteboard slips from a rack in the corner. Suddenly Mr. Shorter jerked himself upright again, and became very solemn.

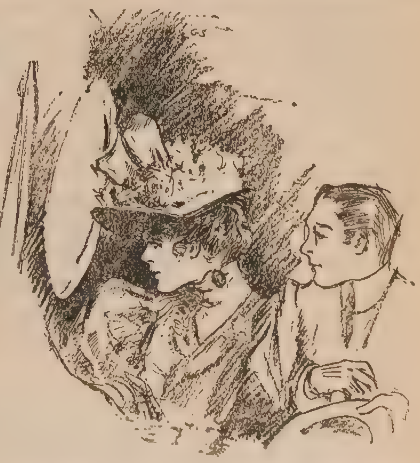
"Where's my hat?" he demanded.

"What do you want with your hat?" Mr. Cuthbert inquired.

"Why, I'm going with you, of course," Mr. Shorter replied. "I've decided to take a personal interest in this matter. You may regard my presence, Cuthbert, as justified by an artistic passion for my profession. I should never forgive myself if Mrs. Spence didn't get just the right house."

"Oh," said Mr. Cuthbert, "I'll manage that all right. I thought you were going to see the representative of a syndicate at eleven."

Mr. Shorter, with a sigh, acknowledged this necessity, and escorted Honora gallantly through the office and across the sidewalk to the waiting hansom. Cuthbert got in beside her.



"Jerry's a joker," he observed as they drove off, "you mustn't mind him."

"I think he's delightful," said Honora.

"One wouldn't believe that a man of his size and appearance could be so fond of women," said Mr. Cuthbert. "He's the greatest old lady-killer that ever breathed. For two cents he would have come with us this morning, and let a five thousand dollar commission go. Do you know Mrs. Shorter?"

"No," replied Honora. "She looks most attractive. I caught a glimpse of her at the polo that day with you."

"I've been at her house in Newport ever since. Came down yesterday to try to earn some money," he continued, cheerfully making himself agreeable. "Deuced clever woman, much too clever for me — and Jerry too. Always in a tête-à-tête with an antiquarian or a pathologist, or a psychologist, and tells novelists what to put into their next books and jurists how to decide cases. Full of modern and liberal ideas — believes in free love and all that sort of thing, and gives Jerry the dickens for practising it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Honora.

Mr. Cuthbert, however, did not appear to realize that he had shocked her.

"By the way," he asked, "have you seen Cecil Grainger since the Quicksands game?"

"No," she replied. "Has Mr. Grainger been at Quicksands since?"

"Nobody knows where he's been," answered Mr. Cuthbert. "It's a mystery. He hasn't been home — at Newport, I mean — for a fortnight. He's never stayed away so long without letting any one know where he is. Naturally they thought he was at Mrs. Kame's in Banbury, but she hasn't laid eyes on him. It's a mystery. My own theory is that he went to sleep in a parlour car and was sent to the yards, and hasn't waked up."

"And isn't Mrs. Grainger worried?" asked Honora.

"Oh, you never can tell anything about her," he said. "Do you know her? She's a sphinx. All the Pendletons are Stoics. And besides, she's been so busy with this Charities Conference that she hasn't had time to think of Cecil. Who's that?"

"That" was a lady from Rivington, one of Honora's former neighbours, to whom she had bowed. Life, indeed, is full of contrasts. Mr. Cuthbert, too, was continually bowing and waving to acquaintances on the Avenue.

Thus pleasantly conversing, they arrived at the first house on the list, and afterwards went through a succession of them. Once inside, Honora would look helplessly about her in the darkness while her escort would raise the shades, admitting a gloomy light on bare interiors or shrouded furniture.

And the rents! Four, five, six, and seven and eight thousand dollars a year. Pride prevented her from discussing these prices with Mr. Cuthbert; and in truth, when lunch time came, she had seen nothing which realized her somewhat vague but persistent ideals.

"I'm so much obliged to you," she said, "and I hope you'll forgive me for wasting your time."

Mr. Cuthbert smiled broadly, and Honora smiled too.

Indeed, there was something ludicrous in the remark. He assumed an attitude of reflection.

"I imagine you wouldn't care to go over beyond Lexington Avenue, would you? I didn't think to ask you."

"No," she replied, blushing a little, "I shouldn't care to go over as far as that."

He pondered a while longer, when suddenly his face lighted up.

"I've got it!" he cried, "the very thing — why didn't I think of it? Dicky Farnham's house, or rather his wife's house. I'll get it straight after a while, — she isn't his wife any more, you know; she married Eustace Rindge last month. That's the reason it's for rent. Dicky says he'll never get married again — you bet! They planned it together, laid the corner-stone and all that sort of thing, and before it was finished she had a divorce and had gone abroad with Rindge. I saw her before she sailed, and she begged me to rent it. But it isn't furnished."

"I might look at it," said Honora, dubiously.

"I'm sure it will just suit you," he declared with enthusiasm. "It's a real find. We'll drive around by the office and get the keys."

The house was between Fifth Avenue and Madison, on a cross street not far below Fifty-Ninth, and Honora had scarcely entered the little oak-panelled hall before she had forgotten that Mr. Cuthbert was a real estate agent — a most difficult thing to remember.

Upstairs, the drawing-room was flooded with sunlight that poured in through a window with stone mullions and leaded panes extending the entire width of the house. Against the wall stood a huge stone mantel of the Tudor period, and the ceiling was of wood. Behind the little hall a cosey library lighted by a well, and behind that an ample dining-room. And Honora remembered to have seen, in a shop on Fourth Avenue, just the sideboard for such a setting.

On the third floor, as Mr. Cuthbert pointed out, there was a bedroom and boudoir for Mrs. Spence, and a bedroom and dressing-room for Mr. Spence. Into the domestic arrangement of the house, however important, we need not penetrate. The rent was eight thousand dollars, which Mr. Cuthbert thought extremely reasonable.

"Eight thousand dollars!" As she stood with her back turned, looking out on the street, some trick of memory brought into her mind the fact that she had once heard her uncle declare that he had bought his house and lot for that exact sum. And as cashier of Mr. Isham's bank, he did not earn so much in a year.

She had found the house, indeed, but the other and mightier half of the task remained, of getting Howard into it. In the consideration of this most difficult of problems Honora, who in her exaltation had beheld herself installed in every room, grew suddenly serious. She was startled out of her reflections by a remark of almost uncanny penetration on the part of Mr. Cuthbert.

"Oh, he'll come round all right, when he sees the house," that young gentleman declared.

Honora turned quickly, and, after a moment of astonishment, laughed in spite of herself. It was impossible not to laugh with Mr. Cuthbert, so irresistible and debonair was he, so confiding and sympathetic, that he became, before one knew it, an accomplice. Had he not poured out to Honora, with a charming gayety and frankness, many of his financial troubles?

"I'm afraid he'll think it frightfully expensive," she answered, becoming thoughtful once more. And it did not occur to her that neither of them had mentioned the individual to whom they referred.

"Wait until he's feeling tiptop," Mr. Cuthbert advised, "and then bring him up here in a hurry. I say, I hope you do take the house," he added, with a boyish seriousness after she had refused his appeal to lunch with him, "and that you will let me come and see you once in a while."

She lunched alone, in a quiet corner of the dining-room of one of the large hotels, gazing at intervals absently out of the window. And by the middle of the afternoon she found herself, quite unexpectedly, in the antique furniture shop, gazing at the sideboard and a set of leather-seated Jacobean chairs, and bribing the dealer with a smile to hold them for a few days until she could decide whether she wished them. In a similar mood of abstraction she boarded the ferry, but it was not until the boat had started on its journey that she became aware of a trim, familiar figure in front of her, silhouetted against the ruffled blue waters of the river — Trixton Brent's. And presently, as though the concentration of her thoughts upon his back had summoned him, he turned.

"Where have you been all this time?" she asked. "I haven't seen you for an age."

"To Seattle."

"To Seattle!" she exclaimed. "What were you doing there?"

"Trying to forget you," he replied promptly, "and incidentally attempting to obtain control of some properties. Both efforts, I may add, were unsuccessful."

"I'm sorry," said Honora.

"And what mischief," he demanded, "have you been up to?"

"You'll never guess!" she exclaimed.

"Preparing for the exodus," he hazarded.

"You surely don't expect me to stay in Quicksands all winter?" she replied, a little guiltily.

"Quicksands," he declared, "has passed into history."

"You always insist upon putting a wrong interpretation upon what I do," she complained.

He laughed.

"What interpretation do you put on it?" he asked

"A most natural and praiseworthy one," she answered. "Education, improvement, growth — these things are as necessary for a woman as for a man. Of course I don't expect you to believe that — your idea of women not being a very exalted one."

He did not reply, for at that instant the bell rang, the passengers pressed forward about them, and they were soon in the midst of the confusion of a landing. It was not until they were seated in adjoining chairs of the parlour car that the conversation was renewed.

"When do you move to town?" he inquired.

However simple Mr. Brent's methods of reasoning may appear to others, his apparent clairvoyance never failed to startle Honora.

"Somebody has told you that I've been looking at houses!" she exclaimed.

"Have you found one?"

She hesitated.

"Yes — I have found one. It belongs to some people named Farnham — they're divorced."

"Dicky Farnham's ex-wife," he supplied. "I know where it is — unexceptionable neighbourhood and all that sort of thing."

"And it's just finished," continued Honora, her enthusiasm gaining on her as she spoke of the object which had possessed her mind for four hours. "It's the most enchanting house, and so sunny for New York. If I had built it myself it could not have suited me better. Only —"

"Only —" repeated Trixton Brent, smiling.

"Well," she said slowly, "I really oughtn't to talk about it. I — I haven't said anything to Howard yet, and he may not like it. I ran across it by the merest accident."

"What will you give me," he said, "if I can induce Howard to like it?"

"My eternal friendship," she laughed.

"That's not enough," said Trixton Brent.

CHAPTER IX

INTRODUCING A REVOLUTIONIZING VEHICLE

"HOWARD," said Honora that evening, "I've been going through houses to-day."

"Houses!" he exclaimed, looking up from his newspaper.

"And I've been most fortunate," she continued. "I found one that Mrs. Farnham built — she is now Mrs. Rindge. It is just finished, and so attractive. If I'd looked until doomsday I couldn't have done any better."

"But great Scott!" he ejaculated, "what put the notion of a town house into your head?"

"Isn't it high time to be thinking of the winter?" she asked. "It's nearly the end of September."

He was inarticulate for a few moments, in an evident desperate attempt to rally his forces to meet such an unforeseen attack.

"Who said anything about going to town?" he inquired.

"Now, Howard, don't be foolish," she replied. "Surely you didn't expect to stay in Quicksands all winter?"

"Foolish!" he repeated, and added inconsequently, "why not?"

"Because," said Honora, calmly, "I have a life to lead as well as you."

"But you weren't satisfied until you got to Quicksands, and now you want to leave it."

"I didn't bargain to stay here in the winter," she declared. "You know very well that if you were unfortunate it would be different. But you're quite prosperous."

"How do you know?" he demanded unguardedly.

"Quicksands tells me," she said. "It is — a little humiliating not to have more of your confidence, and to hear such things from outsiders."

"You never seemed interested in business matters," he answered uneasily.

"I should be," said Honora, "if you would only take the trouble to tell me about them." She stood up. "Howard, can't you see that it is making us — grow apart? If you won't tell me about yourself and what you're doing, you drive me to other interests. I am your wife, and I ought to know — I want to know. The reason I don't understand is because you've never taken the trouble to teach me. I wish to lead my own life, it is true — to develop. I don't want to be like these other women down here. I — I was made for something better. I'm sure of it. But I wish my life to be joined to yours, too — and it doesn't seem to be. And sometimes — I'm afraid I can't explain it to you — sometimes I feel lonely and frightened, as though I might do something desperate. And I don't know what's going to become of me."

He laid down his newspaper and stared at her helplessly, with the air of a man who suddenly finds himself at sea in a small boat without oars.

"Oh, you can't understand!" she cried. "I might have known you never could."

He was, indeed, thoroughly perplexed and uncomfortable: unhappy might not be too strong a word. He got up awkwardly and put his hand on her arm. She did not respond. He drew her, limp and unresisting, down on the lounge beside him.

"For heaven's sake, what *is* the matter, Honora?" he faltered. "I — I thought we were happy. You were getting on all right, and seemed to be having a good time down here. You never said anything about — this."

She turned her head and looked at him — a long, searching look with widened eyes.

"No," she said slowly, "you don't understand. I suppose it isn't your fault."

"I'll try," he said, "I don't like to see you — upset like this. I'll do anything I can to make you happy."

"Not *things*, not — not toys," Trixton Brent's expression involuntarily coming to her lips. "Oh, can't you see I'm not that kind of a woman? I don't want to be bought. I want *you*, whatever you are, if you are. I want to be saved. Take care of me — see a little more of me — be a little interested in what I think. God gave me a mind, and — other men have discovered it. You don't know, you can't know, what temptations you subject me to. It isn't right, Howard. And oh, it is humiliating not to be able to interest one's husband."

"But you do interest me," he protested.

She shook her head.

"Not so much as your business," she said; "not — nearly so much."

"Perhaps I have been too absorbed," he confessed. "One thing has followed another. I didn't suspect that you felt this way. Come, I'll try to brace up." He pressed her to him. "Don't feel badly. You're overwrought. You've exaggerated the situation, Honora. We'll go in on the eight o'clock train together and look at the house — although I'm afraid it's a little steep," he added cautiously.

"I don't care anything about the house," said Honora. "I don't want it."

"There!" he said soothingly, "you'll feel differently in the morning. We'll go and look at it, anyway."

Her quick ear, however, detected an undertone which, if not precisely resentment, was akin to the vexation that an elderly gentleman might be justified in feeling who has taken the same walk for twenty years, and is one day struck by a falling brick. Howard had not thought of consulting her in regard to remaining all winter in Quicksands. And, although he might not realize it himself, if he should consent to go to New York one reason for his acquiescence would be that the country in winter offered a more or less favourable atmosphere for the recurrence of similar unpleasant and unaccountable domestic convulsions. Business demands peace at any price. And the ultimatum at Rivington, though delivered in so different a manner, recurred to him.

The morning sunlight, as is well known, is a dispeller of moods, a disintegrator of the night's fantasies. It awoke Honora at what for her was a comparatively early hour, and as she dressed rapidly she heard her husband whistling in his room. It is idle to speculate on the phenomenon taking place within her, and it may merely be remarked in passing that she possessed a quality which, in a man, leads to a career and fame. Unimagined numbers of America's women possess that quality — a fact that is becoming more and more apparent every day.

"Why, Honora!" Howard exclaimed, as she appeared at the breakfast table. "What's happened to you?"

"Have you forgotten already," she asked, smilingly, as she poured out her coffee, "that we are going to town together?"

He readjusted his newspaper against the carafe.

"How much do you think Mrs. Farnham — or Mrs. Rindge — is worth?" he asked.

"I'm sure I don't know," she replied.

"Old Marshall left her five million dollars."

"What has that to do with it?" inquired Honora.

"She isn't going to rent, especially in that part of town, for nothing."

"Wouldn't it be wiser, Howard, to wait and see the house. You know you proposed it yourself, and it won't take very much of your time."

He returned to a perusal of the financial column, but his eye from time to time wandered from the sheet to his wife, who was reading her letters.

"Howard," she said, "I feel dreadfully about Mrs. Holt. We haven't been at Silverdale all summer. Here's a note from her saying she'll be in town to-morrow for the Charities Conference, asking me to come to see her at her hotel. I think I'll go to Silverdale a little later."

"Why don't you?" he said. "It would do you good."

"And you?" she asked.

"My only day of the week is Sunday, Honora. You know that. And I wouldn't spend another day at Silverdale if they gave me a deed to the property," he declared.

On the train, when Howard had returned from the smoking car and they were about to disembark at Long Island City, they encountered Mr. Trixton Brent.

"Whither away?" he cried in apparent astonishment. "Up at dawn, and the eight o'clock train!"

"We were going to look at a house," explained Honora, "and Howard has no other time."

"I'll go, too," declared Mr. Brent, promptly. "You mightn't think me a judge of houses, but I am. I've lived in so many bad ones that I know a good one when I see it now."

"Honora has got a wild notion into her head that I'm going to take the Farnham house," said Howard, smiling. There, on the deck of the ferryboat, in the flooding sunlight, the idea seemed to give him amusement. With the morning light Pharaoh must have hardened his heart.

"Well, perhaps you are," said Mr. Brent, conveying to Honora his delight in the situation by a scarcely perceptible wink. "I shouldn't like to take the other end of the bet. Why shouldn't you? You're fat and healthy and making money faster than you can gather it in."

Howard coughed, and laughed a little, uncomfortably. Trixton Brent was not a man to offend.

"Honora has got that delusion, too," he replied. He steeled himself in his usual manner for the ordeal to come by smoking a cigarette, for the arrival of such a powerful ally on his wife's side lent a different aspect to the situation.

Honora, during this colloquy, was silent. She was a little uncomfortable, and pretended not to see Mr. Brent's wink.

"Incredible as it may seem, I expected to have my automobile ready this morning," he observed; "we might have gone in that. It landed three days ago, but so far it has failed to do anything but fire off revolver shots."

"Oh, I do wish you had it," said Honora, relieved by the change of subject. "To drive in one must be such a wonderful sensation."

"I'll let you know when it stops shooting up the garage and consents to move out," he said. "I'll take you down to Quicksands in it."

The prospective arrival of Mr. Brent's French motor car, which was looked for daily, had indeed been one of the chief topics of conversation at Quicksands that summer. He could appear at no lunch or dinner party without being subjected to a shower of questions as to where it was, and as many as half a dozen different women — among whom was Mrs. Chandos — declared that he had promised to bring them out from New York on the occasion of its triumphal entry into the colony. Honora, needless to say, had betrayed no curiosity.

Neither Mr. Shorter nor Mr. Cuthbert had appeared at the real estate office when, at a little after nine o'clock, Honora asked for the keys. And an office boy, perched on the box seat of the carriage, drove with them to the house and opened the wrought-iron gate that guarded the entrance, and the massive front door. Honora had a sense of unreality as they entered, and told herself it was obviously ridiculous that she should aspire to such a dwelling. Yesterday, under the spell of that somewhat adventurous excursion with Mr. Cuthbert, she had pictured herself as installed. He had contrived somehow to give her a sense of intimacy with the people who lived thereabout — his own friends.

Perhaps it was her husband who was the disillusionizing note as he stood on the polished floor of the sun-flooded drawing-room. Although bare of furniture, it was eloquent to Honora of a kind of taste not to be found at Quicksands: it carried her back, by undiscernible channels of thought, to the impression which, in her childhood, the Hanbury mansion had always made. Howard, in her present whimsical fancy, even seemed a little grotesque in such a setting. His inevitable pink shirt and obviously prosperous clothes made discord there, and she knew in this moment that he was appraising the house from a commercial standpoint. His comment confirmed her guess.

"If I were starting out to blow myself, or you, Honora," he said, poking with his stick a marmouset of the carved stone mantel, "I'd get a little more for my money while I was about it."

Honora did not reply. She looked out of the window instead.

"See here, old man," said Trixton Brent, "I'm not a real estate dealer or an architect, but if I were in your place I'd take that carriage and hustle over to Jerry Shorter's as fast as I could and sign the lease."

Howard looked at him in some surprise, as one who had learned that Trixton Brent's opinions were usually worth listening to. Characteristically, he did not like to display his ignorance.

"I know what you mean, Brent," he replied, "and there may be something to the argument. It gives an idea of conservativeness and prosperity."

"You've made a bull's-eye," said Trixton Brent, succinctly.

"But—but I'm not ready to begin on this scale," objected Howard.

"Why," cried Brent, with evident zest—for he was a man who enjoyed sport in all its forms, even to baiting the husbands of his friends,—"when I first set eyes on you, old fellow, I thought you knew a thing or two, and you've made a few turns since that confirmed the opinion. But I'm beginning to perceive that you have limitations. I could sit down here now, if there were any place to sit, and calculate how much living in this house would be worth to me in Wall Street."

Honora, who had been listening uneasily, knew that a shrewder or more disturbing argument could not have been used on her husband; and it came from Trixton Brent—to Howard at least—*ex cathedrâ.* She was filled with a sense of shame, which was due not solely to the fact that she was a little conscience-stricken because of her innocent complicity, nor that her husband did not resent an obvious attempt of a high-handed man to browbeat him; but also to the feeling that the character of the discussion had in some strange way degraded the house itself. Why was it that everything she touched seemed to become contaminated?

"There's no use staying any longer," she said. "Howard doesn't like it — "

"I didn't say so," he interrupted. "There's something about the place that grows on you. If I felt I could afford it — "

"At any rate," declared Honora, trying to control her voice, "I've decided, now I've seen it a second time, that I don't want it. I only wished him to look at it," she added, scornfully aware that she was taking up the cudgels in his behalf. But she could not bring herself, in Brent's presence, to declare that the argument of the rent seemed decisive.

Her exasperation was somewhat increased by the expression on Trixton Brent's face, which plainly declared that he deemed her last remarks to be the quintessence of tactics; and he obstinately refused, as they went down the stairs to the street, to regard the matter as closed.

"I'll take him down town in the Elevated," he said, as he put her into the carriage. "The first round's a draw."

She directed the driver to the ferry again, and went back to Quicksands. Several times during the day she was on the point of telephoning Brent not to try to persuade Howard to rent the house, and once she even got so far as to take down the receiver. But when she reflected, it seemed an impossible thing to do. At four o'clock she herself was called to the telephone by Mr. Cray, a confidential clerk in Howard's office, who informed her that her husband had been obliged to leave town suddenly on business, and would not be home that night.

"Didn't he say where he was going?" asked Honora.

"He didn't even tell me, Mrs. Spence," Cray replied, "and Mr. Dallam doesn't know."

"Oh, dear," said Honora, "I hope he realizes that people are coming for dinner to-morrow evening."

"I'm positive, from what he said, that he'll be back some time to-morrow," Cray reassured her.

She refused an invitation to dine out, and retired shortly after her own dinner with a novel so distracting that she gradually regained an equable frame of mind. The uneasiness, the vague fear of the future, wore away, and she slept peacefully. In the morning, however, she found on her breakfast tray a note from Trixton Brent.

Her first feeling after reading it was one of relief that he had not mentioned the house. He had written from a New York club, asking her to lunch with him at Delmonico's that day and drive home in the motor. No answer was required: if she did not appear at one o'clock, he would know she couldn't come.

Honora took the eleven o'clock train, which gave her an hour after she arrived in New York to do as she pleased. Her first idea, as she stood for a moment amidst the clamour of the traffic in front of the ferry house, was to call on Mrs. Holt at that lady's hotel; and then she remembered that the Charities Conference began at eleven, and decided to pay a visit to Madame Dumond, who made a specialty of importing novelties in dress. Her costume for the prospective excursion in the automobile had cost Honora some thought that morning. As the day was cool, she had brought along an ulster that was irreproachable. But how about the hat and veil?

Madame Dumond was enchanted. She had them both, — she had landed with them only last week. She tried them on Honora, and stood back with her hands clasped in an ecstasy she did not attempt to hide. What a satisfaction to sell things to Mrs. Spence! Some ladies she could mention would look like frights in them, but Madame Spence had de la race. She could wear anything that was chic. The hat and veil, said Madame, with a simper, were sixty dollars.

"Sixty dollars!" exclaimed Honora.

"Ah, madame, what would you?" Novelties were novelties, the United States Custom authorities robbers.

Having attended to these important details, Honora drove to the restaurant in her hansom cab, the blood coursing pleasantly in her veins. The autumn air sparkled, and New York was showing signs of animation. She glanced furtively into the little mirror at the side. Her veil was grey, and with the hat gave her somewhat the air of a religieuse, an aspect heightened by the perfect oval of her face; and something akin to a religious thrill ran through her.

The automobile, with its brass and varnish shining in the sunlight, was waiting a little way up the street, and the first person Honora met in the vestibule of Delmonico's was Lula Chandos. She was, as usual, elaborately dressed, and gave one the impression of being lost, so anxiously was she scanning the face of every new arrival.

"Oh, my dear," she cried, staring hard at the hat and the veil, "have you seen Clara Trowbridge anywhere?"

A certain pity possessed Honora as she shook her head.

"She was in town this morning," continued Mrs. Chandos, "and I was sure she was coming here to lunch. Trixy just drove up a moment ago in his new car. Did you see it?"

Honora's pity turned into a definite contempt.

"I saw an automobile as I came in," she said, but the brevity of her reply seemed to have no effect upon Mrs. Chandos.

"There he is now, at the entrance to the café," she exclaimed.

There, indeed, was Trixton Brent, staring at them from the end of the hall, and making no attempt to approach them.

"I think I'll go into the dressing-room and leave my coat," said Honora, outwardly calm but inwardly desperate. Fortunately, Lula made no attempt to follow her.

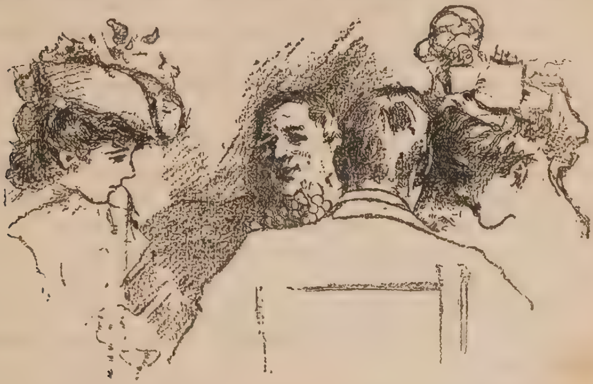
"You're a dream in that veil, my dear," Mrs. Chandos called after her. "Don't forget that we're all dining with you to-night in Quicksands."

Once in the dressing-room, Honora felt like locking the doors and jumping out of the window. She gave her coat to the maid, rearranged her hair without any apparent reason, and was leisurely putting on her hat again, and wondering what she would do next, when Mrs. Kame appeared.

"Trixy asked me to get you," she explained. "Mr. Grainger and I are going to lunch with you."

"How nice!" said Honora, with such a distinct emphasis of relief that Mrs. Kame looked at her queerly.

"What a fool Trixy was, with all his experience, to get mixed up with that Chandos woman," that lady remarked as they passed through the hallway. "She's like molasses — one can never get her off. Lucky thing he found Cecil and me here. There's your persistent friend, Trixy," she added, when they were seated. "Really, this is pathetic, when an invitation to lunch and a drive in your car would have made her so happy."



Honora looked around and beheld, indeed, Mrs. Chandos and two other Quicksands women, Mrs. Randall and Mrs. Barclay, at a table in the corner of the room.

"Where's Bessie to-day, Cecil — or do you know?" demanded Mrs. Kame, after an amused glance at Brent, who had not deigned to answer her. "I promised to go to Newport with her at the end of the week, but I haven't been able to find her."

"Cecil doesn't know," said Trixton Brent. "The police have been looking for him for a fortnight. Where the deuce have you been, Cecil?"

"To the Adirondacks," replied Mr Grainger, gravely.

This explanation, which seemed entirely plausible to Honora, appeared to afford great amusement to Brent, and even to Mrs. Kame.

"When did you come to life?" demanded Brent.

"Yesterday," said Mr. Grainger, quite as solemnly as before.

Mrs. Kame glanced curiously at Honora, and laughed again.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Trixy," she said.

"Why?" he asked innocently. "There's nothing wrong in going to the Adirondacks—is there, Cecil?"

"No," said Mr. Grainger, blinking rapidly.

"The Adirondacks," declared Mrs. Kame, "have now become classic."

"By the way," observed Mr. Grainger, "I believe Bessie's in town to-day at a charity pow-wow, reading a paper. I've half a mind to go over and listen to it. The white dove of peace—and all that kind of thing."

"You'd go to sleep and spoil it all," said Brent.

"But you can't, Cecil!" cried Mrs. Kame. "Don't you remember we're going to Westchester to the Faunces' to spend the night and play bridge? And we promised to arrive early."

"That's so, by George," said Mr. Grainger, and he drank the rest of his whiskey-and-soda.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, if Mrs. Spence is willing," suggested Brent. "If you start right after lunch, I'll take you out. We'll have plenty of time," he added to Honora, "to get back to Quicksands for dinner."

"Are you sure?" she asked anxiously. "I have people for dinner to-night."

"Oh, lots of time," declared Mrs. Kame. "Trixy's car is some unheard-of horse-power. It's only twenty-five miles to the Faunces', and you'll be back at the ferry by half-past four."

"Easily," said Trixton Brent.

CHAPTER X

ON THE ART OF LION TAMING

AFTER lunch, while Mrs. Kame was telephoning to her maid and Mr. Grainger to Mrs. Faunce, Honora found herself alone with Trixton Brent in the automobile at a moment when the Quicksands party were taking a cab. Mrs. Chandos paused long enough to wave her hand.

"Bon voyage!" she cried. "What an ideal party! and the chauffeur doesn't understand English. If you don't turn up this evening, Honora, I'll entertain your guests."

"We *must* get back," said Honora, involuntarily to Brent. "It would be too dreadful if we didn't!"

"Are you afraid I'll run off with you?" he asked.

"I believe you're perfectly capable of it," she replied. "If I were wise, I'd take the train."

"Why don't you?" he demanded.

She smiled.

"I don't know. It's because of your deteriorating influence, I suppose. And yet I trust you, in spite of my instincts and — my eyes. I'm seriously put out with you."

"Why?"

"I'll tell you later, if you're at a loss," she said, as Mrs. Kame and Mr. Grainger appeared.

Eight years have elapsed since that day and this writing — an æon in this rapidly moving Republic of ours. The roads, although far from perfect yet, were not then what they have since become. But the weather was dry and the voyage to Westchester accomplished successfully. It was half-past three when they drove up the avenue and deposited Mrs. Kame and Cecil Grainger at the long front of the Faunce house: and Brent, who had been driving, relinquished the wheel to the chauffeur and joined Honora in the tonneau. The day was perfect, the woods still heavy with summer foliage, and the only signs of autumn were the hay mounds and the yellowing cornstalks stacked amidst the stubble of the fields.

Brent sat silently watching her, for she had raised her veil in saying good-by to Mrs. Kame, and—as the chauffeur was proceeding slowly — had not lowered it. Suddenly she turned and looked him full in the face.

"What kind of woman do you think I am?" she demanded.

"That's rather a big order, isn't it?" he said.

"I'm perfectly serious," continued Honora, slowly. "I'd really like to know."

"Before I begin on the somewhat lengthy list of your qualities," he replied, smiling, "may I ask why you'd like to know?"

"Yes," she said quickly. "I'd like to know because I think you've misjudged me. I was really more angry than you have any idea of at the manner in which you talked to Howard. And did you seriously suppose that I was in earnest when we spoke about your assistance in persuading him to take the house?"

He laughed.

"You are either the cleverest woman in the world," he declared, "or else you oughtn't to be out without a guardian. And no judge in possession of his five senses would appoint your husband."

Indignant as she was, she could not resist smiling. There was something in the way Brent made such remarks that fascinated her.

"I shouldn't call you precisely eligible, either," she retorted.

He laughed again. But his eyes made her vaguely uneasy.

"Are these harsh words the reward for my charity?" he asked.

"I'm by no means sure it's charity," she said. "That's what is troubling me. And you have no right to say such things about — my husband."

"How was I to know you were sensitive on the subject?" he replied.

"I wonder what it would be like to be so utterly cynical as you," she said.

"Do you mean to say you don't want the house?"

"I don't want it under those conditions," she answered with spirit. "I didn't expect to be taken literally. And you've always insisted," she added, "in ascribing to me motives that — that never occurred to me. You make the mistake of thinking that because you have no ideals, other people haven't. I hope Howard hasn't said he'd take the house. He's gone off somewhere, and I haven't been able to see him."

Trixton Brent looked at her queerly.

"After that last manœuvre of yours," he said, "it was all I could do to prevent him from rushing over to Jerry Shorter's and signing the lease."

She did not reply.

"What do these sudden, virtuous resolutions mean?" he asked. "Resignation? Quicksands for life? Abandonment of the whole campaign?"

"There isn't any 'campaign,'" she said — and her voice caught in something like a sob. "I'm not that — sordid kind — of a person. And if I don't like Quicksands, it's because the whole atmosphere seems to be charged with — with just such a spirit."

Her hand was lying on the seat. He covered it with his own so quickly that she left it there for a moment, as though paralyzed, while she listened to the first serious words he had ever addressed to her.

"Honora, I admire you more than any woman I have ever known," he said.

Her breath came quickly, and she drew her hand away.

"I suppose I ought to feel complimented," she replied.

At this crucial instant what had been a gliding flight of the automobile became, suddenly, a more or less uneven

Trixton Brent, as might have been expected, was inclined to treat the matter as a joke.

"There's nothing very formal about a Quicksands dinner-party," he said. "We'll have a cosey little dinner in town, and call 'em up on the telephone."

She herself was surprised at the spirit of recklessness stealing over her, for there was, after all, a certain appealing glamour in the adventure. She was thrilled by the swift, gliding motion of the automobile, the weird and unfamiliar character of these upper reaches of a great city in the twilight, where new houses stood alone or in rows on wide levelled tracts; and old houses, once in the country, were seen high above the roadway behind crumbling fences, surrounded by gloomy old trees with rotting branches. She stole a glance at the man close beside her; a delightful fear of him made her shiver, and she shrank closer into the corner of the seat.

"Honora!"

All at once he had seized her hand again, and held it in spite of her efforts to release it.

"Honora," he said, "I love you as I have never loved in my life. As I never shall love again."

"Oh — you mustn't say that!" she cried.

"Why not?" he demanded. "Why not, if I feel it?"

"Because," faltered Honora, "because I can't listen to you."

Brent made a motion of disdain with his free hand.

"I don't pretend that it's right," he said. "I'm not a hypocrite, anyway, thank God! It's undoubtedly wrong, according to all moral codes. I've never paid any attention to them. You're married. I'm happy to say I'm divorced. You've got a husband. I won't be guilty of the bad taste of discussing him. He's a good fellow enough, but he never thinks about you from the time the Exchange opens in the morning until he gets home at night and wants his dinner. You don't love him — it would be a miracle if a woman with any spirit did. He hasn't any more of an idea of what he possesses by legal right than the man I discovered driving in a cart one of the best hunters I ever had in my stables. To say that he doesn't appreciate you is a ludicrous understatement. Any woman would have done for him."

"Please don't!" she implored him. "Please don't!"

But for the moment she knew that she was powerless, carried along like a chip on the crest of his passion.

"I don't pretend to say how it is, or why it is," he went on, paying no heed to her protests. "I suppose there's one woman for every man in the world — though I didn't use to think so. I always had another idea of woman before I met you. I've thought I was in love with 'em, but now I understand it was only — something else. I say, I don't know what it is in you that makes me feel differently. I can't analyze it, and I don't want to. You're not perfect, by a good deal, and God knows I'm not. You're ambitious, but if you weren't, you'd be humdrum — yet there's no pitiful artifice in you as in other women that any idiot can see through. And it would have paralyzed forever any ordinary woman to have married Howard Spence."

A new method of wooing, surely, and evidently peculiar to Trixton Brent. Honora, in the prey of emotions which he had aroused in spite of her, needless to say did not, at that moment, perceive the humour in it. His words gave her food for thought for many months afterwards.

The lion was indeed aroused at last, and whip or goad or wile of no avail. There came a time when she no longer knew what he was saying: when speech, though eloquent and forceful, seemed a useless medium. Her appeals were lost, and she found herself fighting in his arms, when suddenly they turned into one of the crowded arteries of Harlem. She made a supreme effort of will, and he released her.

"Oh!" she cried, trembling.

But he looked at her, unrepentant, with the light of triumph in his eyes.

"I'll never forgive you!" she exclaimed, breathless.

"I gloried in it," he replied. "I shall remember it as long as I live, and I'll do it again."

She did not answer him. She dropped her veil, and for a long space was silent while they rapidly threaded the traffic, and at length turned into upper Fifth Avenue, skirting the Park. She did not so much as glance at him. But he seemed content to watch her veiled profile in the dusk.

Her breath, in the first tumult of her thought, came and went deeply. But gradually as the street lights burned brighter and familiar sights began to appear, she grew more controlled and became capable of reflection. She remembered that there was a train for Quicksands at seven-fifteen, which Howard had taken once or twice. But she felt that the interval was too short. In that brief period she could not calm herself sufficiently to face her guests. Indeed, the notion of appearing alone, or with Brent, at that dinner-party, appalled her. And suddenly an idea presented itself.

Brent leaned over, and began to direct the chauffeur to a well-known hotel. She interrupted him.

"No," she said, "I'd rather go to the Holland House."

"Very well," he said amicably, not a little surprised at this unlooked-for acquiescence, and then told his man to keep straight on down the Avenue.

She began mechanically to rearrange her hat and veil; and after that, sitting upright, to watch the cross streets with feverish anticipation, her hands in her lap.

"Honora?" he said.

She did not answer.

"Raise the veil, just for a moment, and look at me."

She shook her head. But for some reason, best known to herself, she smiled a little. Perhaps it was because her indignation, which would have frightened many men into repentance, left this one undismayed. At any rate, he caught the gleam of the smile through the film of her veil, and laughed.

"We'll have a little table in the corner of the room," he declared, "and you shall order the dinner. Here we are," he cried to the chauffeur. "Pull up to the right."

They alighted, crossed the sidewalk, the doors were flung open to receive them, and they entered the hotel.

Through the entrance to the restaurant Honora caught sight of the red glow of candles upon the white tables, and heard the hum of voices. In the hall, people were talking and laughing in groups, and it came as a distinct surprise to her that their arrival seemed to occasion no remark. At the moment of getting out of the automobile, her courage had almost failed her.

Trixton Brent hailed one of the hotel servants.

"Show Mrs. Spence to the ladies' parlour," said he. And added to Honora, "I'll get a table, and have the dinner card brought up in a few moments."

Honora stopped the boy at the elevator door.

"Go to the office," she said, "and find out if Mrs. Joshua Holt is in, and the number of her room. And take me to the telephone booths. I'll wait there."

She asked the telephone operator to call up Mr. Spence's house at Quicksands — and waited.

"I'm sorry, madam," he said, after a little while, which seemed like half an hour to Honora, "but they've had a fire in the Kingston exchange, and the Quicksands line is out of order."

Honora's heart sank; but the bell-boy had reappeared. Yes, Mrs. Holt was in.

"Take me to her room," she said, and followed him into the elevator.

In response to his knock the door was opened by Mrs. Holt herself. She wore a dove-coloured gown, and in her hand was a copy of the report of the Board of Missions. For a moment she peered at Honora over the glasses lightly poised on the uncertain rim of her nose.

"Why — my dear!" she exclaimed, in astonishment. "Honora!"

"Oh," cried Honora, "I'm so glad you're here. I was so afraid you'd be out."

In the embrace that followed both the glasses and the mission report fell to the floor. Honora picked them up.

"Sit down, my dear, and tell me how *you* happen to be here," said Mrs. Holt. "I suppose Howard is downstairs."

"No, he isn't," said Honora, rather breathlessly; "that's the reason I came here. That's one reason, I mean. I was coming to see you this morning, but I simply didn't have time for a call after I got to town."

Mrs. Holt settled herself in the middle of the sofa, the only piece of furniture in the room in harmony with her ample proportions. Her attitude and posture were both judicial, and justice itself spoke in her delft-blue eyes.

"Tell me all about it," she said, thus revealing her suspicions that there was something to tell.

"I was just going to," said Honora, hastily, thinking of Trixton Brent waiting in the ladies' parlour. "I took lunch at Delmonico's with Mr. Grainger, and Mr. Brent, and Mrs. Kame —"

"Cecil Grainger?" demanded Mrs. Holt.

Honora trembled.

"Yes," she said.

"I knew his father and mother intimately," said Mrs. Holt, unexpectedly. "And his wife is a friend of mine. She's one of the most executive women we have in the 'Working Girls' Association,' and she read a paper to-day that was masterful. You know her, of course."

"No," said Honora, "I haven't met her yet."

"Then how did you happen to be lunching with her husband?"

"I wasn't lunching with him, Mrs. Holt," said Honora; "Mr. Brent was giving the lunch."

"Who's Mr. Brent?" demanded Mrs. Holt. "One of those Quicksands people?"

"He's not exactly a Quicksands person. I scarcely know how to describe him. He's very rich, and goes abroad a great deal, and plays polo. That's the reason he has a little place at Quicksands. He's been awfully kind both to Howard and me," she added with inspiration.

"And Mrs. Kame?" said Mrs. Holt.

"She's a widow, and has a place at Banbury."

"I never heard of her," said Mrs. Holt, and Honora thanked her stars. "And Howard approves of these —

mixed lunches, my dear? When I was young, husbands and wives usually went to parties together."

A panicky thought came to Honora, that Mrs. Holt might suddenly inquire as to the whereabouts of Mr. Brent's wife.

"Oh, Howard doesn't mind," she said hastily. "I suppose times have changed, Mrs. Holt. And after lunch we all went out in Mr. Brent's automobile to the Faunces' in Westchester —"

"The Paul Jones Faunces?" Mrs. Holt interrupted. "What a nice woman that young Mrs. Faunce is! She was Kitty Esterbrook, you know. Both of them very old families."

"It was only," continued Honora, in desperation, "it was only to leave Mr. Grainger and Mrs. Kame there to spend the night. They all said we had plenty of time to go and get back to Quicksands by six o'clock. But coming back the automobile broke down —"

"Of course," said Mrs. Holt, "it serves any one right for trusting to them. I think they are an invention of the devil."

"And we've only just got back to New York this minute."

"Who?" inquired Mrs. Holt.

"Mr. Brent and I," said Honora, with downcast eyes.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the elder lady.

"I couldn't think of anything else to do but come straight here to you," said Honora, gazing at her friend. "And oh, I'm so glad to find you. There's not another train to Quicksands till after nine."

"You did quite right, my dear, under the circumstances. I don't say you haven't been foolish, but it's Howard's fault quite as much as yours. He has no business to let you do such things."

"And what makes it worse," said Honora, "is that the wires are down to Quicksands, and I can't telephone Howard, and we have people to dinner, and they don't know I went to Westchester, and there's no use telegraphing: it wouldn't be delivered till midnight or morning."

"There, there, my dear, don't worry. I know how anxious you feel on your husband's account —"

"Oh — Mrs. Holt, I was going to ask you a great, great favour. Wouldn't you go down to Quicksands with me and spend the night — and pay us a little visit? You know we would so love to have you!"

"Of course I'll go down with you, my dear," said Mrs. Holt. "I'm surprised that you should think for an instant that I wouldn't. It's my obvious duty. Martha!" she called, "Martha!"

The door of the bedroom opened, and Mrs. Holt's elderly maid appeared. The same maid, by the way, who had closed the shutters that memorable stormy night at Silverdale. She had, it seemed, a trick of appearing at crises.

"Martha, telephone to Mrs. Edgerly — you know her number — and say that I am very sorry, but an unexpected duty calls me out of town to-night, and ask her to communicate with the Reverend Mr. Field. As for staying with you, Honora," she continued, "I have to be back at Silverdale to-morrow night. Perhaps you and Howard will come back with me. My frank opinion is, that a rest from the gayety of Quicksands will do you good."

"I will come, with pleasure," said Honora. "But as for Howard — I'm afraid he's too busy."

"And how about dinner?" asked Mrs. Holt.

"I forgot to say," said Honora, "that Mr. Brent's downstairs. He brought me here, of course. Have you any objection to his dining with us?"

"No," answered Mrs. Holt, "I think I should like to see him."

After Mrs. Holt had given instructions to her maid to pack, and Honora had brushed some of the dust of the roads from her costume, they descended to the ladies' parlour. At the far end of it a waiter holding a card was standing respectfully, and Trixton Brent was pacing up and down between the windows. When he caught sight of them he stopped in his tracks, and stared, and stood as if rooted to the carpet. Honora came forward.

"Oh, Mr. Brent!" she cried, "my old friend, Mrs. Holt, is here, and she's going to take dinner with us and come down to Quicksands for the night. May I introduce Mr. Brent."

"Wasn't it fortunate, Mr. Brent, that Mrs. Spence happened to find me?" said Mrs. Holt, as she took his hand. "I know it is a relief to you."

It was not often, indeed, that Trixton Brent was taken off his guard; but some allowance must be made for him, since he was facing a situation unparalleled in his previous experience. Virtue had not often been so triumphant, and never so dramatic as to produce at the critical instant so emblematic a defender as this matronly lady in dove colour. For a moment he stared at her, speechless, and then he gathered himself together.

"A relief?" he asked.

"It would seem so to me," said Mrs. Holt. "Not that I do not think you are perfectly capable of taking care of her, as an intimate friend of her husband. I was merely thinking of the proprieties. And as I am a guest in this hotel, I expect you both to do me the honour to dine with me before we start for Quicksands."

After all, Trixton Brent had a sense of humour, although it must not be expected that he should grasp at once all the elements of a joke on himself so colossal.

"I, for one," he said, with a slight bow which gave to his words a touch somewhat elaborate, "shall be delighted." And he shot at Honora a glance compounded of many feelings, which she returned smilingly.

"Is that the waiter?" asked Mrs. Holt.

"That is *a* waiter," said Trixton Brent, glancing at the motionless figure. "Shall I call him?"

"If you please," said Mrs. Holt. "Honora, you must tell me what you like."

"Anything, Mrs. Holt," said Honora.

"If we are to leave a little after nine," said that lady, balancing her glasses on her nose and glancing at the card, "we have not, I'm afraid, time for many courses."

The head waiter greeted them at the door of the dining-

"Men cover a multitude of sins under the plea of business," said Mrs. Holt, shaking her head. "I can't say I think much of your method of distraction. Why any one desires to get into an automobile, I don't see."

"Have you ever been in one?" he asked. "Mine is here, and I was about to invite you to go down to the ferry in it. I'll promise to go slow."

"Well," said Mrs. Holt, "I don't object to going that distance, if you keep your promise. I'll admit that I've always had a curiosity."

"And in return," said Brent, gallantly, "allow me to send you a cheque for your working girls."

"You're very good," said Mrs. Holt.

"Oh," he protested, "I'm not in the habit of giving much to charities, I'm sorry to say. I'd like to know how it feels."

"Then I hope the sensation will induce you to try it again," said Mrs. Holt.

"Nobody, Mrs. Holt," cried Honora, "could be kinder to his friends than Mr. Brent!"

"We were speaking of disinterested kindness, my dear," was Mrs. Holt's reply.

"You're quite right, Mrs. Holt," said Trixton Brent, beginning, as the dinner progressed, to take in the lady opposite a delight that surprised him. "I'm willing to confess that I've led an extremely selfish existence."

"The confession isn't necessary," she replied. "It's written all over you. You're the type of successful man who gets what he wants. I don't mean to say that you are incapable of kindly instincts." And her eye twinkled a little.

"I'm very grateful for that concession, at any rate," he declared.

"There might be some hope for you if you fell into the hands of a good woman," said Mrs. Holt. "I take it you are a bachelor. Mark my words, the longer you remain one, the more steeped in selfishness you are likely to become in this modern and complex and sense-satisfying life which so many people lead."

Honora trembled for what he might say to this, remembering his bitter references of that afternoon to his own matrimonial experience. Visions of a scene arose before her in the event that Mrs. Holt should discover his status. But evidently Trixton Brent had no intention of discussing his marriage.

"Judging by some of my married friends and acquaintances," he said, "I have no desire to try matrimony as a remedy for unselfishness."

"Then," replied Mrs. Holt, "all I can say is, I should make new friends amongst another kind of people, if I were you. You are quite right, and if I were seeking examples of happy marriages, I should not begin my search among the so-called fashionable set of the present day. They are so supremely selfish that if the least difference in taste develops, or if another man or woman chances along whom they momentarily fancy more than their own husbands or wives, they get a divorce. Their idea of marriage is not a mutual sacrifice which brings happiness through trials borne together and through the making of character. No, they have a notion that man and wife may continue to lead their individual lives. That isn't marriage. I've lived with Joshua Holt thirty-five years last April, and I haven't pleased myself in all that time."

"All men," said Trixton Brent, "are not so fortunate as Mr. Holt."

Honora began to have the sensations of a witness to a debate between Mephistopheles and the powers of heaven. Her head swam. But Mrs. Holt, who had unlooked-for flashes of humour, laughed, and shook her curls at Brent.

"I should like to lecture you some time," she said; "I think it would do you good."

He shook his head.

"I'm beyond redemption. Don't you think so, Honora?" he asked, with an unexpected return of his audacity.

"I'm afraid I'm not worthy to judge you," she replied, and coloured.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Mrs. Holt; "women are superior to men, and it's our duty to keep them in order. And if we're really going to risk our lives in your automobile, Mr. Brent, you'd better make sure it's there," she added, glancing at her watch.

Having dined together in an apparent and inexplicable amity, their exit was of even more interest to the table in the corner than their entrance had been. Mrs. Holt's elderly maid was waiting in the hall, Mrs. Holt's little trunk was strapped on the rear of the car; and the lady herself, with something of the feelings of a missionary embarking for the wilds of Africa, was assisted up the little step and through the narrow entrance of the tonneau by the combined efforts of Honora and Brent. An expression of resolution, emblematic of a determination to die, if necessary, in the performance of duty, was on her face as the machinery started; and her breath was not quite normal when, in an incredibly brief period, they descended at the ferry.

The journey to Quicksands was accomplished in a good fellowship which Honora, an hour before, would not have dreamed of. Even Mrs. Holt was not wholly proof against the charms of Trixton Brent when he chose to exert himself; and for some reason he did so choose. As they stood in the starlight on the platform of the deserted little station while he went across to Whelen's livery stable to get a carriage, Mrs. Holt remarked to Honora: —

"Mr. Brent is a fascinating man, my dear."

"I am so glad that you appreciate him," exclaimed Honora.

"And a most dangerous one," continued Mrs. Holt. "He has probably, in his day, disturbed the peace of mind of a great many young women. Not that I haven't the highest confidence in you, Honora, but honesty forces me to confess that you are young and pleasure-loving and a little heedless. And the atmosphere in which you live is not likely to correct those tendencies. If you will take my advice, you will not see too much of Mr. Trixton Brent when your husband is not present."

Indeed, as to the probable effect of this incident on the relations between Mr. Brent and herself Honora was wholly in the dark. Although, from her point of view, what she had done had been amply justified by the plea of self-defence, it could not be expected that he would accept it in the same spirit. The apparent pleasure he had taken in the present situation, once his amazement had been overcome, profoundly puzzled her.

He returned in a few minutes with the carriage and driver, and they started off. Brent sat in front, and Honora explained to Mrs. Holt the appearance of the various places by daylight, and the names of their owners. The elderly lady looked with considerable interest at the blazing lights of the Club, with the same sensations she would no doubt have had if she had been suddenly set down within the Moulin Rouge. Shortly afterwards they turned in at the gate of "The Brackens." The light streamed across the porch and driveway, and the sound of music floated out of the open windows. Within, the figure of Mrs. Barclay could be seen; she was singing vaudeville songs at the piano. Mrs. Holt's lips were tightly shut as she descended and made her way up the steps.

"I hope you'll come in," said Honora to Trixton Brent, in a low voice.

"Come in!" he replied, "I wouldn't miss it for ten thousand dollars."

Mrs. Holt was the first of the three to appear at the door of the drawing-room, and Mrs. Barclay caught sight of her, and stopped in the middle of a bar, with her mouth open. Some of the guests had left. A table in the corner, where Lula Chandos had insisted on playing bridge, was covered with scattered cards and some bills, a decanter of whiskey, two soda bottles, and two glasses. The blue curling smoke from Mrs. Chandos' cigarette mingled with the haze that hung between the ceiling and the floor, and that lady was in the act of saying cheerfully to Howard, who sat opposite,—

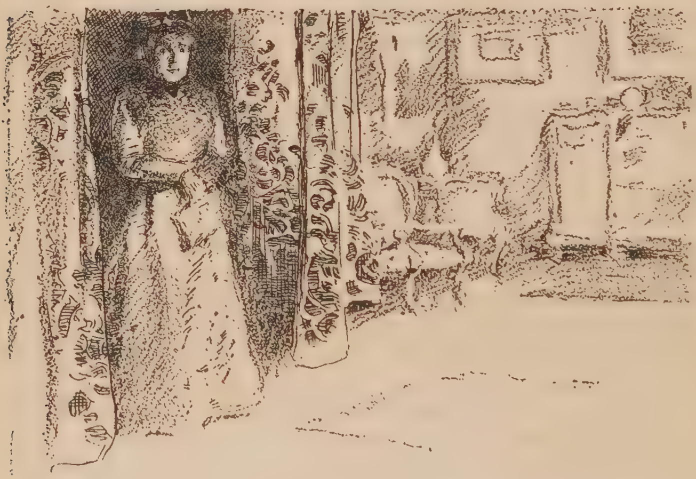
"Trixy's run off with her."

Suddenly the chill of silence pervaded the room. Lula

Chandos, whose back was turned to the door, looked from Mrs. Barclay to Howard, who, with the other men, had risen to his feet.

"What's the matter?" she said in a frightened tone. And, following the eyes of the others, turned her head slowly towards the doorway.

Mrs. Holt, who filled it, had been literally incapable of speech. Close behind her stood Honora and Trixton Brent, whose face was inscrutable.



"Howard," said Honora, summoning all the courage that remained in her, "here's Mrs. Holt. We dined with her, and she was good enough to come down for the night. I'm so sorry not to have been here," she added to her guests, "but we went to Westchester with Mrs. Kame and Mr. Grainger, and the automobile broke down on the way back."

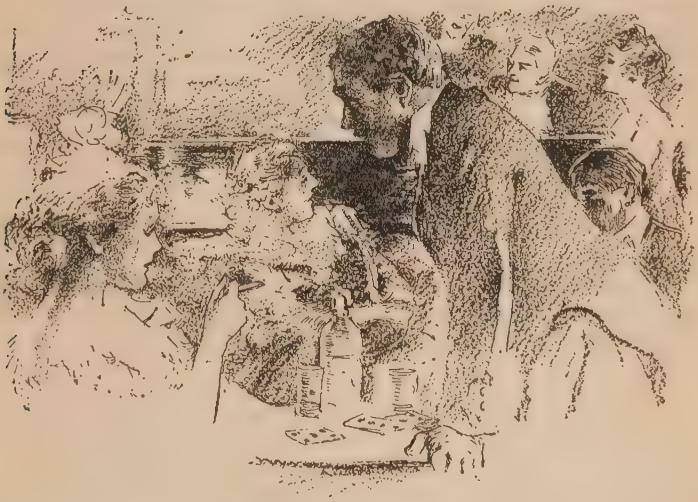
Mrs. Holt made no attempt to enter, but stared fixedly at the cigarette that Mrs. Chandos still held in her trembling fingers. Howard crossed the room in the midst of an intense silence.

"Glad to see you, Mrs. Holt," he said. "Er — won't you come in and — and sit down?"

"Thank you, Howard," she replied, "I do not wish to interrupt your — party. It is my usual hour for retiring. And I think, my dear," she added, turning to Honora, "that I'll ask you to excuse me, and show me to my room."

"Certainly, Mrs. Holt," said Honora, breathlessly. "Howard, ring the bell."

She led the way up the stairs to the guest-chamber with the rose paper and the little balcony. As she closed the door gusts of laughter reached them from the floor below, and she could plainly distinguish the voices of May Barclay and Trixton Brent.



"I hope you'll be comfortable, Mrs. Holt," she said. "Your maid will be in the little room across the hall — and I believe you like breakfast at eight."

"You mustn't let me keep you from your guests, Honora."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she said, on the verge of tears, "I don't want to go to them. Really, I don't."

"It must be confessed," said Mrs. Holt, opening her handbag and taking out the copy of the mission report, which had been carefully folded, "that they seem to be able to get along very well without you. I suppose I am too old to understand this modern way of living. How well I remember one night — it was in 1886 — I missed the train to Silverdale, and my telegram miscarried. Poor Mr. Holt was nearly out of his head."

She fumbled for her glasses and dropped them. Honora picked them up, and it was then she perceived that the tears were raining down the good lady's cheeks. At the same moment they sprang into Honora's eyes, and blinded her. Mrs. Holt looked at her long and earnestly.

"Go down, my dear," she said gently, "you must not neglect your friends. They will wonder where you are. And at what time do you breakfast?"

"At — at any time you like."

"I shall be down at eight," said Mrs. Holt, and she kissed her.

Honora, closing the door, stood motionless in the hall, and presently the footsteps and the laughter and the sound of carriage wheels on the gravel died away.

CHAPTER XI

CONTAINING SOME REVELATIONS

HONORA, as she descended, caught a glimpse of the parlour maid picking up the scattered cards on the drawing-room floor. There were voices on the porch, where Howard was saying good-by to Mrs. Chandos and Trixton Brent. She joined them.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Mrs. Chandos, interrupting Honora's apologies, "I'm sure I shan't sleep a wink — she gave me such a fright. You *might* have sent Trixy ahead to prepare us. When I first caught sight of her, I thought it was my own dear mother who had come all the way from Cleveland, and the cigarette burned my fingers. But I must say I think it was awfully clever of you to get hold of her and save Trixy's reputation. Good night, dear."

And she got into her carriage.

"Give my love to Mrs. Holt," said Brent, as he took Honora's hand, "and tell her I feel hurt that she neglected to say good night to me. I thought I had made an impression. Tell her I'll send her a cheque for her rescue work. She inspires me with confidence."

Howard laughed.

"I'll see you to-morrow, Brent," he called out as they drove away. Though always assertive, it seemed to Honora that her husband had an increased air of importance as he turned to her now with his hands in his pockets. He looked at her for a moment, and laughed again. He, too, had apparently seen the incident only in a humorous light. "Well, Honora," he remarked, "you have a sort of a P. T. Barnum way of doing things once in a while — haven't you? Is the old lady really tucked away for the night, or is she coming down to read us a sermon? And how the deuce did you happen to pick her up?"

She had come downstairs with confession on her lips, and in the agitation of her mind had scarcely heeded Brent's words or Mrs. Chandos'. She had come down prepared for any attitude but the one in which she found him; for anger, reproaches, arraignments. Nay, she was surprised to find now that she had actually hoped for these. She deserved to be scolded: it was her right. If he had been all of a man, he would have called her to account. There must be — there *was* something lacking in his character. And it came to her suddenly, with all the shock of a great contrast, with what different eyes she had looked upon him five years before at Silverdale.

He went into the house and started to enter the drawing-room, still in disorder and reeking with smoke.

"No, not in there!" she cried sharply.

He turned to her puzzled. Her breath was coming and going quickly. She crossed the hall and turned on the light in the little parlour there, and he followed her.

"Don't you feel well?" he asked.

"Howard," she said, "weren't you worried?"

"Worried? No, why should I have been? Lula Chandos and May Barclay had seen you in the automobile in town, and I knew you were high and dry somewhere."

"High and dry," she repeated.

"What?"

"Nothing. They said I had run off with Mr. Brent, didn't they?"

He laughed.

"Yes, there was some joking to that effect."

"You didn't take it seriously?"

"No — why should I?"

She was appalled by his lack of knowledge of her. All these years she had lived with him, and he had not grasped even the elements of her nature. And this was marriage! Trixton Brent — short as their acquaintance had been — had some conception of her character and possibilities — her husband none. Where was she to begin? How was she to tell him of the episode in the automobile in order that he might perceive something of its sinister significance? Where was she to go to be saved from herself, if not to him?

"I might have run away with him, if I had loved him," she said after a pause. "Would you have cared?"

"You bet your life," said Howard, and put his arm around her.

She looked up into his face. So intent had she been on what she had meant to tell him that she did not until now perceive he was preoccupied, and only half listening to what she was saying.

"You bet your life," he said, patting her shoulder. "What would I have done, all alone, in the new house?"

"In the new house?" she cried. "Oh, Howard — you — you haven't taken it!"

"I haven't signed the lease," he replied importantly, smiling down at her, and thrusting his hands in his pockets.

"I don't want it," said Honora; "I don't want it. I told you that I'd decided I didn't want it when we were there. Oh, Howard, why did you take it?"

He whistled. He had the maddening air of one who derives amusement from the tantrums of a spoiled child.

"Well," he remarked, "women are too many for me. If there's any way of pleasing 'em I haven't yet discovered it. The night before last you had to have the house. Nothing else would do. It was the greatest find in New York. For the first time in months you get up for breakfast — a pretty sure sign you hadn't changed your mind. You drag me to see it, and when you land me there, because I don't lose my head immediately, you say you don't want it. Of course I didn't take you seriously — I thought you'd set your heart on it, so I wired an offer to Shorter to-day, and he accepted it. And when I hand you this pleasant little surprise, you go right up in the air."

He had no air of vexation, however, as he delivered this somewhat reproachful harangue in the picturesque language to which he commonly resorted. Quite the contrary. He was still smiling, as Santa Claus must smile when he knows he has another pack up the chimney.

"Why this sudden change of mind?" he demanded. "It can't be because you want to spend the winter in Quicksands."

She was indeed at a loss what to say. She could not bring herself to ask him whether he had been influenced by Trixton Brent. If he had, she told herself, she did not wish to know. He was her husband, after all, and it would be too humiliating. And then he had taken the house.

"Have you hit on a palace you like better?" he inquired, with a clumsy attempt at banter. "They tell me the elder Maitlands are going abroad — perhaps we could get their house on the Park."

"You said you couldn't afford Mrs. Rindge's house," she answered uneasily, "and I — I believed you."

"I couldn't," he said mysteriously, and paused.

It seemed to her, as she recalled the scene afterwards, that in this pause he gave the impression of physically swelling. She remembered staring at him with wide, frightened eyes and parted lips.

"I couldn't," he repeated, with the same strange emphasis and a palpable attempt at complacency. "But — er — circumstances have changed since then."

"What do you mean, Howard?" she whispered.

The corners of his mouth twitched in the attempt to repress a smile.

"I mean," he said, "that the president of a trust company can afford to live in a better house than the junior partner of Dallam and Spence."

"The president of a trust company!" Honora scarcely recognized her own voice — so distant it sounded. The room rocked, and she clutched the arm of a chair and sat down. He came and stood over her.

"I thought that would surprise you some," he said, obviously pleased by these symptoms. "The fact is, I hadn't meant to break it to you until morning. But I think I'll go in on the seven thirty-five." (He glanced significantly up at the ceiling, as though Mrs. Holt had something to do with this decision.) "President of the Orange Trust Company at forty isn't so bad, eh?"

"The Orange Trust Company? Did you say the Orange Trust Company?"

"Yes." He produced a cigarette. "Old James Wing and Brent practically control it. You see, if I do say it myself, I handled some things pretty well for Brent this summer, and he's seemed to appreciate it. He and Wing were buying in traction stocks out West. But you could have knocked me down with a paper-knife when he came to me — "

"When did he come to you?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yesterday. We went down town together, you remember, and he asked me to step into his office. Well, we talked it over, and I left on the one o'clock for Newport to see Mr. Wing. Wonderful old man! I sat up with him till midnight — it wasn't any picnic" . . .

More than once during the night Honora awoke with a sense of oppression, and each time went painfully through the whole episode from the evening — some weeks past — when Trixton Brent had first mentioned the subject of the trust company, to the occurrence in the automobile and Howard's triumphant announcement. She had but a vague notion of how that scene had finished; or of how, limply, she had got to bed. Round and round the circle she went in each waking period. To have implored him to relinquish the place had been waste of breath; and then — her reasons? These were the moments when the current was strongest, when she grew incandescent with humiliation and pain; when stray phrases in red letters of Brent's were illuminated. Merit! He had a contempt for her husband which he had not taken the trouble to hide. But not a *business* contempt. "As good as the next man," Brent had said — or words to that effect. "*As good as the next man!*" Then she had tacitly agreed to the bargain, and refused to honour the bill! No, she had not, she had not. Before God, she was innocent of that! When she reached this point it was always to James Wing that she clung —

the financier, at least, had been impartial. And it was he who saved her.

At length she opened her eyes to discover with bewilderment that the room was flooded with light, and then she sprang out of bed and went to the open window. To seaward hung an opal mist, struck here and there with crimson. She listened; some one was whistling an air she had heard before — Mrs. Barclay had been singing it last night! Wheels crunched the gravel — Howard was going off. She stood motionless until the horse's hoofs rang on the highroad, and then hurried into her dressing-gown and slippers and went downstairs to the telephone and called a number.

"Is this Mr. Brent's? Will you say to Mr. Brent that Mrs. Spence would be greatly obliged if he stopped a moment at her house before going to town? Thank you."

She returned to her room and dressed with feverish haste, trying to gather her wits for an ordeal which she felt it would have killed her to delay. At ten minutes to eight she emerged again and glanced anxiously at Mrs. Holt's door; and scarcely had she reached the lower hall before he drove into the circle. She was struck more forcibly than ever by the physical freshness of the man, and he bestowed on her, as he took her hand, the peculiar smile she knew so well, that always seemed to have an enigma behind it. At sight and touch of him the memory of what she had prepared to say vanished.

"Behold me, as ever, your obedient servant," he said, as he followed her into the screened-off portion of the porch.

"You must think it strange that I sent for you, I know," she cried, as she turned to him. "But I couldn't wait. I — I did not know until last night. Howard only told me then. Oh, you didn't do it for me! Please say you didn't do it for me!"

"My dear Honora," replied Trixton Brent, gravely, "we wanted your husband for his abilities and the valuable services he can render us."

She stood looking into his eyes, striving to penetrate to the soul behind, ignorant or heedless that others before her had tried and failed. He met her gaze unflinchingly, and smiled.

"I want the truth," she craved.

"I never lie — to a woman," he said.

"My life — my future depends upon it," she went on. "I'd rather scrub floors, I'd rather beg — than to have it so. You must believe me!"

"I do believe you," he affirmed. And he said it with a gentleness and a sincerity that startled her.

"Thank you," she answered simply. And speech became very difficult. "If — if I haven't been quite fair with you — Mr. Brent, I am sorry. I — I liked you, and I like you to-day better than ever before. And I can quite see now how I must have misled you into thinking — queer things about me. I didn't mean to. I have learned a lesson."

She took a deep, involuntary breath. The touch of lightness in his reply served to emphasize the hitherto unsuspected fact that sportsmanship in Trixton Brent was not merely a code, but assumed something of the grandeur of a principle.

"I, too, have learned a lesson," he replied. "I have learned the difference between nature and art. I am — something of a connoisseur in art. I bow to nature, and pay my bets."

"Your bets?" she asked, with a look.

"My renunciations, forfeits, whatever you choose to call them. I have been fairly and squarely beaten — but by nature, not by art. That is my consolation."

Laughter struck into her eyes like a shaft of sunlight into a well; her emotions were no longer to be distinguished. And in that moment she wondered what would have happened if she had loved this man, and why she had not. And when next he spoke, she started.

"How is my elderly dove-coloured friend this morning?" he asked. "That dinner with her was one of the great events of my life. I didn't suppose such people existed any more."

"Perhaps you'll stay to breakfast with her," suggested Honora, smiling. "I know she'd like to see you again."

"No, thanks," he said, taking her hand, "I'm on my way to the train — I'd quite forgotten it. Au revoir!" He reached the end of the porch, turned, and called back, "As a *dea ex machina*, she has never been equalled."

Honora stood for a while looking after him, until she heard a footstep behind her, — Mrs. Holt's.

"Who was that, my dear?" she asked, "Howard?"

"Howard has gone, Mrs. Holt," Honora replied, rousing herself. "I must make his apologies. It was Mr. Brent."

"Mr. Brent!" the good lady repeated, with a slight upward lift of the faint eyebrows. "Does he often call this early?"

Honora coloured a little, and laughed.

"I asked him to breakfast with you, but he had to catch a train. He — wished to be remembered. He took such a fancy to you."

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Holt, "that his fancy is a thing to be avoided. Are you coming to Silverdale with me, Honora?"

"Yes, Mrs. Holt," she replied, slipping her arm through that of her friend, "for as long as you will let me stay."

And she left a note for Howard to that effect.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

ASCENDI

HONORA did not go back to Quicksands. Neither, in this modern chronicle, shall we.

The sphere we have left, which we know is sordid, sometimes shines in the retrospect. And there came a time, after the excitement of furnishing the new house was over, when our heroine, as it were, swung for a time in space: not for a very long time; that month, perhaps, between autumn and winter.

We need not be worried about her, though we may pause for a moment or two to sympathize with her in her loneliness — or rather in the moods it produced. She even felt, in those days, slightly akin to the Lady of the Victoria (perfectly respectable), whom all of us fortunate enough occasionally to go to New York have seen driving on Fifth Avenue with an expression of wistful haughtiness, and who changes her costumes four times a day.

Sympathy! We have seen Honora surrounded by friends — what has become of them? Her husband is president of a trust company, and she has one of the most desirable houses in New York. What more could be wished for? To jump at conclusions in this way is by no means to understand a heroine with an Ideal. She had these things, and — strange as it may seem — suffered.

Her sunny drawing-room, with its gathered silk curtains, was especially beautiful; whatever the Leffingwells or Allisons may have lacked, it was not taste. Honora sat in it and wondered: wondered, as she looked back over the road she had threaded somewhat blindly towards the Ideal, whether she might not somewhere have taken the wrong turn. The farther she travelled, the more she seemed to penetrate into a land of unrealities. The exquisite objects by which she was surrounded, and which she had collected with such care, had no substance: she would not have been greatly surprised, at any moment, to see them vanish like a scene in a theatre, leaving an empty, windy stage behind them. They did not belong to her, nor she to them.

Past generations of another blood, no doubt, had been justified in looking upon the hazy landscapes in the great tapestries as their own: and children's children had knelt, in times gone by, beside the carved stone mantel. The big, gilded chairs with the silken seats might appropriately have graced the table of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Would not the warriors and the wits, the patient ladies of high degree and of many children, and even the précieuses ridicules themselves, turn over in their graves if they could so much as imagine the contents of the single street in modern New York where Honora lived?

One morning, as she sat in that room, possessed by these whimsical though painful fancies, she picked up a newspaper and glanced through it, absently, until her eye fell by chance upon a name on the editorial page. Something like an electric shock ran through her, and the letters of the name seemed to quiver and become red. Slowly they spelled — Peter Erwin.

"The argument of Mr. Peter Erwin, of St. Louis, before the Supreme Court of the United States in the now celebrated Snowden case is universally acknowledged by lawyers to have been masterly, and reminiscent of the great names of the profession in the past. Mr. Erwin is not dramatic. He appears to carry all before him by the sheer force of intellect, and by a kind of Lincolnian ability to expose a fallacy. He is still a young man, self-made, and studied law under Judge Brice of St. Louis, once President of the National Bar Association, whose partner he is". . .

Honora cut out the editorial and thrust it in her gown, and threw the newspaper in the fire. She stood for a time after it had burned, watching the twisted remnants fade from flame colour to rose, and finally blacken. Then she went slowly up the stairs and put on her hat and coat and veil. Although a cloudless day, it was windy in the park, and cold, the ruffled waters an intense blue. She walked fast.

She lunched with Mrs. Holt, who had but just come to town; and the light, like a speeding guest, was departing from the city when she reached her own door.

"There is a gentleman in the drawing-room, madam," said the butler. "He said he was an old friend, and a stranger in New York, and asked if he might wait."

She stood still with presentiment.

"What is his name?" she asked.

"Mr. Erwin," said the man.

Still she hesitated. In the strange state in which she found herself that day, the supernatural itself had seemed credible. And yet — she was not prepared.

"I beg pardon, madam," the butler was saying, "perhaps I shouldn't — ?"

"Yes, yes, you should," she interrupted him, and pushed past him up the stairs. At the drawing-room door she paused — he was unaware of her presence. And he had not changed! She wondered why she had expected him to change. Even the glow of his newly acquired fame was not discernible behind his well-remembered head. He seemed no older — and no younger. And he was standing with his hands behind his back gazing in simple, silent appreciation at the big tapestry nearest the windows.

"Peter," she said, in a low voice.

He turned quickly, and then she saw the glow. But it was the old glow, not the new — the light in which her early years had been spent.

"What a coincidence!" she exclaimed, as he took her hand.

"Coincidence?"

"It was only this morning that I was reading in the newspaper all sorts of nice things about you. It made me feel like going out and telling everybody you were an old friend of mine." Still holding his fingers, she pushed him away from her at arm's length, and looked at him. "What does it feel like to be famous, and have editorials about one's self in the New York newspapers?"

He laughed, and released his hands somewhat abruptly.

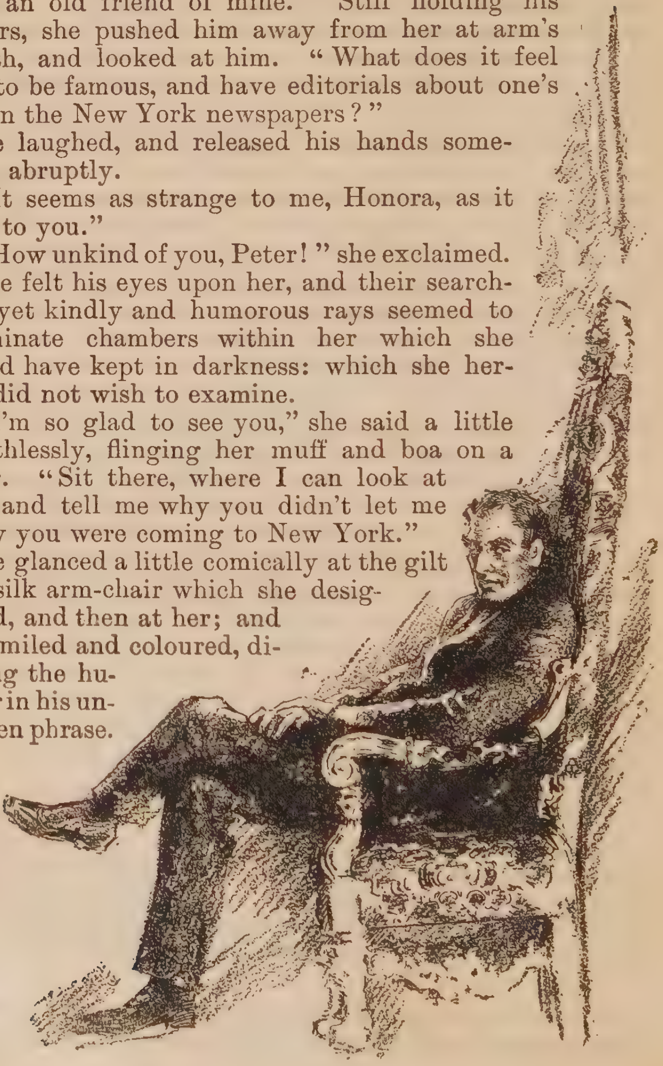
"It seems as strange to me, Honora, as it does to you."

"How unkind of you, Peter!" she exclaimed.

She felt his eyes upon her, and their searching, yet kindly and humorous rays seemed to illuminate chambers within her which she would have kept in darkness: which she herself did not wish to examine.

"I'm so glad to see you," she said a little breathlessly, flinging her muff and boa on a chair. "Sit there, where I can look at you, and tell me why you didn't let me know you were coming to New York."

He glanced a little comically at the gilt and silk arm-chair which she designated, and then at her; and she smiled and coloured, divining the humour in his unspoken phrase.



"For a great man," she declared, "you are absurd."

He sat down. In spite of his black clothes and the lounging attitude he habitually assumed, with his knees crossed, he did not appear incongruous in a seat that would have harmonized with the flowing robes of the renowned French Cardinal himself. Honora wondered why. He impressed her to-day as force — tremendous force in repose, and yet he was the same Peter. Why was it? Had the clipping that even then lay in her bosom effected this magic change? He had intimated as much, but she denied it fiercely.

She rang for tea.

"You haven't told me why you came to New York," she said.

"I was telegraphed for, from Washington, by a Mr. Wing," he explained.

"*A* Mr. Wing," she repeated. "You don't mean by any chance James Wing?"

"*The* Mr. Wing," said Peter.

"The reason I asked," explained Honora, flushing, "was because Howard is — associated with him. Mr. Wing is largely interested in the Orange Trust Company."

"Yes, I know," said Peter. His elbows were resting on the arms of his chair, and he looked at the tips of his fingers, which met. Honora thought it strange that he did not congratulate her, but he appeared to be reflecting.

"What did Mr. Wing want?" she inquired in her momentary confusion, and added hastily, "I beg your pardon, Peter. I suppose I ought not to ask that."

"He was kind enough to wish me to live in New York," he answered, still staring at the tips of his fingers.

"Oh, how nice!" she cried — and wondered at the same time whether, on second thoughts, she would think it so. "I suppose he wants you to be the counsel for one of his trusts. When — when do you come?"

"I'm not coming."

"Not coming! Why? Isn't it a great compliment?"

He ignored the latter part of her remark; and it seemed to her, when she recalled the conversation afterwards, that she had heard a certain note of sadness under the lightness of his reply.

"To attempt to explain to a New Yorker why any one might prefer to live in any other place would be a difficult task."

"You are incomprehensible, Peter," she declared. And yet she felt a relief that surprised her, and a desire to get away from the subject. "Dear old St. Louis! Somehow, in spite of your greatness, it seems to fit you."

"It's growing," said Peter — and they laughed together.

"Why didn't you come to lunch?" she said.

"Lunch! I didn't know that any one ever went to lunch in New York — in this part of it, at least — with less than three weeks' notice. And by the way, if I am interfering with any engagement — "

"My book is not so full as all that. Of course you'll come and stay with us, Peter."

He shook his head regretfully.

"My train leaves at six, from Forty-Second Street," he replied.

"Oh, you are *niggardly*," she cried. "To think how little I see of you, Peter. And sometimes I long for you. It's strange, but I still miss you terribly — after five years. It seems longer than that," she added, as she poured the boiling water into the tea-pot. But she did not look at him.

He got up and walked as far as a water-colour on the wall.

"You have some beautiful things here, Honora," he said. "I am glad I have had a glimpse of you surrounded by them to carry back to your aunt and uncle."

She glanced about the room as he spoke, and then at him. He seemed the only reality in it, but she did not say so.

"You'll see them soon," was what she said. And considered the miracle of him staying there where Providence had placed him, and bringing the world to him. Whereas she, who had gone forth to seek it —

"The day after to-morrow will be Sunday," he reminded her.

Nothing had changed there. She closed her eyes and saw the little dining room in all the dignity of Sunday dinner, the big silver soup tureen catching the sun, the flowered china with the gilt edges, and even a glimpse of lace paper when the closet door opened; Aunt Mary and Uncle Tom with Peter between them. And these, strangely, were the only tangible things and immutable.

"You'll give them — a good account of me?" she said. "I know that you do not care for New York," she added with a smile. "But it is possible to be happy here."

"I am glad you are happy, Honora, and that you have got what you wanted in life. Although I may be unreasonable and provincial and — and Western," he confessed with a twinkle — for he had the characteristic national trait of shading off his most serious remarks — "I have never gone so far as to declare that happiness was a question of locality."

She laughed.

"Nor fame." Her mind returned to the loadstar.

"Oh, fame!" he exclaimed, with a touch of impatience, and he used the word that had possessed her all day. "There is no reality in that. Men are not loved for it."

She set down her cup quickly. He was looking at the water-colour.

"Have you been to the Metropolitan Museum lately?" he asked.

"The Metropolitan Museum?" she repeated in bewilderment.

"That would be one of the temptations of New York for me," he said. "I was there for half an hour this afternoon before I presented myself at your door as a suspicious character. There is a picture there, by Coffin, called 'The Rain,' I believe. I am very fond of it. And looking at it on such a winter's day as this brings back the summer. The squall coming, and the sound of it in the trees, and the very smell of the wet meadow-grass in the wind. Do you know it?"

"No," replied Honora, and she was suddenly filled with shame at the thought that she had never been in the Museum. "I didn't know you were so fond of pictures."

"I am beginning to be a rival of Mr. Dwyer," he declared. "I've bought four — although I haven't built my gallery. When you come to St. Louis I'll show them to you — and let us hope it will be soon."

For some time after she had heard the street door close behind him Honora remained where she was, staring into the fire, and then she crossed the room to a reading lamp, and turned it up.

Some one spoke in the doorway.

"Mr. Grainger, madam."

Before she could rouse herself and recover from her astonishment, the gentleman himself appeared, blinking as though the vision of her were too bright to be steadily gazed at. If the city had been searched, it is doubtful whether a more striking contrast to the man who had just left could have been found than Cecil Grainger in the braided, grey cutaway that clung to the semblance of a waist he still possessed. In him Hyde Park and Fifth Avenue, so to speak, shook hands across the sea: put him in either, and he would have appeared indigenous.

"Hope you'll forgive my comin' 'round on such slight acquaintance, Mrs. Spence," said he. "Couldn't resist the opportunity to pay my respects. Shorter told me where you were."

"That was very good of Mr. Shorter," said Honora, whose surprise had given place to a very natural resentment, since she had not the honour of knowing Mrs. Grainger.

"Oh," said Mr. Grainger, "Shorter's a good sort. Said he'd been here himself to see how you were fixed, and hadn't found you in. Uncommonly well fixed, I should say," he added, glancing around the room with undisguised approval. "Why the deuce did she furnish it, since she's gone to Paris to live with Rindge?"

"I suppose you mean Mrs. Rindge," said Honora. "She didn't furnish it."

Mr. Grainger winked at her rapidly, like a man suddenly brought face to face with a mystery.

"Oh!" he replied, as though he had solved it. The solution came a few moments later. "It's ripping!" he said. "Farwell couldn't have done it any better."

Honora laughed, and momentarily forgot her resentment.

"Will you have tea?" she asked. "Oh, don't sit down there!"

"Why not?" he asked, jumping. It was the chair that had held Peter, and Mr. Grainger examined the seat as though he suspected a bent pin.

"Because," said Honora, "because it isn't comfortable. Pull up that other one."

Again mystified, he did as he was told. She remembered his reputation for going to sleep, and wondered whether she had been wise in her second choice. But it soon became apparent that Mr. Grainger, as he gazed at her from among the cushions, had no intention of dozing. His eyelids reminded her of the shutters of a camera, and she had the feeling of sitting for thousands of instantaneous photographs for his benefit. She was by turns annoyed, amused, and distrait: Peter was leaving his hotel; now he was taking the train. Was he thinking of her? He had said he was glad she was happy! She caught herself up with a start after one of these silences to realize that Mr. Grainger was making unwonted and indeed pathetic exertions to entertain her, and it needed no feminine eye to perceive that he was thoroughly uncomfortable. She had, unconsciously and in thinking of Peter, rather overdone the note of rebuke of his visit. And Honora was, above all else, an artist. His air was distinctly apologetic as he rose, perhaps a little mortified, like that of a man who has got into the wrong house.

"I very much fear I've intruded, Mrs. Spence," he stammered, and he was winking now with bewildering rapidity. "We — we had such a pleasant drive together that day to Westchester — I was tempted — "

"We *did* have a good time," she agreed. "And it has been a pleasure to see you again."

Thus, in the kindness of her heart, she assisted him to cover his retreat, for it was a strange and somewhat awful experience to see Mr. Cecil Grainger discountenanced. He glanced again, as he went out, at the chair in which he had been forbidden to sit.

She went to the piano, played over a few bars of *Thais*, and dropped her hands listlessly. Cross currents of the strange events of the day flowed through her mind: Peter's arrival and its odd heralding, and the discomfort of Mr. Grainger.

Howard came in. He did not see her under the shaded lamp, and she sat watching him with a curious feeling of detachment as he unfolded his newspaper and sank, with a sigh of content, into the cushioned chair which Mr. Grainger had vacated. Was it fancy that her husband's physical attributes had changed since he had attained his new position of dignity? She could have sworn that he had visibly swollen on the evening when he had announced to her his promotion, and he seemed to have remained swollen. Not bloated, of course: he *was* fatter, and — if possible — pinker. But there was a growing suggestion in him of humming-and-hawing greatness. If there were leisure in this too-leisurely chronicle for what might be called aftermath, the dinner that Honora had given to some of her Quicksands friends might be described. Suffice it to recall, with Honora, that Lily Dallam, with a sure instinct, had put the finger of her wit on this new attribute of Howard's.

"You'll kill me, Howard!" she had cried. "He even looks at the soup as though he were examining a security!"

Needless to say, it did not cure him, although it sealed Lily Dallam's fate — and incidentally that of Quicksands. Honora's thoughts as she sat now at the piano watching him, flew back unexpectedly to the summer at Silverdale when she had met him, and she tried to imagine the genial and boyish representative of finance that he was then. In the midst of this effort he looked up and discovered her.

"What are you doing over there, Honora?" he asked.

"Thinking," she answered.

"That's a great way to treat a man when he comes home after a day's work."

"I beg your pardon, Howard," she said with unusual meekness. "Who do you think was here this afternoon?"

"Erwin? I've just come from Mr. Wing's house — he has gout to-day and didn't go down town. He offered Erwin a hundred thousand a year to come to New York as corporation counsel. And if you'll believe me — he refused it."

"I'll believe you," she said.

"Did he say anything about it to you?"

"He simply mentioned that Mr. Wing asked him to come to New York. He didn't say why."

"Well," Howard remarked, "he's one too many for me. He can't be making over thirty thousand where he is."

CHAPTER II

THE PATH OF PHILANTHROPY

Mrs. Cecil Grainger may safely have been called a Personality, and one of the proofs of this was that she haunted people who had never seen her. Honora might have looked at her, it is true, on the memorable night of the dinner with Mrs. Holt and Trixton Brent; but — for sufficiently obvious reasons — refrained. It would be an exaggeration to say that Mrs. Grainger became an obsession with our heroine; yet it cannot be denied that, since Honora's arrival at Quicksands, this lady had, in increasing degrees, been the subject of her speculations. The threads of Mrs. Grainger's influence were so ramified, indeed, as to be found in Mrs. Dallam, who declared she was the rudest woman in New York and yet had copied her brougham; in Mr. Cuthbert and Trixton Brent; in Mrs. Kame; in Mrs. Holt, who proclaimed her a tower of strength in charities; and lastly in Mr. Grainger himself, who, although he did not spend much time in his wife's company, had for her an admiration that amounted to awe.

Elizabeth Grainger, who was at once modern and tenaciously conservative, might have been likened to some of the Roman matrons of the aristocracy in the last years of the Republic. Her family, the Pendletons, had traditions: so, for that matter, had the Graingers. But Senator Pendleton, *antiquâ homo virtute et fide*, had been a Roman of the old school who would have preferred exile after the battle of Philippi; and who, could he have foreseen modern New York and modern finance, would have been more content to die when he did. He had lived in Washington Square. His daughter inherited his executive ability, many of his prejudices (as they would now be called), and his habit of regarding favourable impressions with profound suspicion. She had never known the necessity of making friends: hers she had inherited, and for some reason specially decreed, they were better than those of less fortunate people.

Mrs. Grainger was very tall. And Sargent, in his portrait of her, had caught with admirable art the indefinable, yet partly supercilious and scornful smile with which she looked down upon the world about her. She possessed the rare gift of combining conventionality with personal distinction in her dress. Her hair was almost Titian red in colour, and her face (on the authority of Mr. Reginald Farwell) was at once modern and Italian Renaissance. Not the languid, amorous Renaissance, but the lady of decision who chose, and did not wait to be chosen. Her eyes had all the colours of the topaz, and her regard was so baffling as to arouse intense antagonism in those who were not her friends.

To Honora, groping about for a better and a higher life, the path of philanthropy had more than once suggested itself. And on the day of Peter's visit to New York, when she had lunched with Mrs. Holt, she had signified her willingness (now that she had come to live in town) to join the Working Girls' Relief Society. Mrs. Holt, needless to say, was overjoyed: they were to have a meeting at her house in the near future which Honora must not fail to attend. It was not, however, without a feeling of trepidation natural to a stranger that she made her way to that meeting when the afternoon arrived.

No sooner was she seated in Mrs. Holt's drawing-room — filled with camp-chairs for the occasion — than she found herself listening breathlessly to a recital of personal experiences by a young woman who worked in a bindery on the East side. Honora's heart was soft: her sympathies, as we know, easily aroused. And after the young woman had told with great simplicity and earnestness of the struggle to support herself and lead an honest and self-respecting existence, it seemed to Honora that at last she had opened the book of life at the proper page.

Afterwards there were questions, and a report by Miss Harber, a middle-aged lady with glasses who was the secretary. Honora looked around her. The membership of the Society, judging by those present, was surely of a sufficiently heterogeneous character to satisfy even the catholic tastes of her hostess. There were elderly ladies, some benevolent and some formidable, some bedecked and others unadorned; there were earnest-looking younger women, to whom dress was evidently a secondary consideration; and there was a sprinkling of others, perfectly gowned, several of whom were gathered in an opposite corner. Honora's eyes, as the reading of the report progressed, were drawn by a continual and resistless attraction to this group; or rather to the face of one of the women in it, which seemed to stare out at her like the cat in the tree of an old-fashioned picture puzzle, or the lineaments of George Washington among a mass of boulders on a cliff. Once one has discovered it, one can see nothing else. In vain Honora dropped her eyes; some strange fascination compelled her to raise them again until they met those of the other woman. *Did* their glances meet? She could never quite be sure, so disconcerting were the lights in that regard — lights, seemingly, of laughter and mockery.

Some instinct informed Honora that the woman was Mrs. Grainger, and immediately the scene in the Holland House dining-room came back to her. Never until now had she felt the full horror of its comedy. And then, as though to fill the cup of humiliation, came the thought of Cecil Grainger's call. She longed, in an agony with which sensitive natures will sympathize, for the reading to be over.

The last paragraph of the report contained tributes to Mrs. Joshua Holt and Mrs. Cecil Grainger for the work each had done during the year, and amidst enthusiastic handclapping the formal part of the meeting came to an end. The servants were entering with tea as Honora made her way towards the door, where she was stopped by Susan Holt.

"My dear Honora," cried Mrs. Holt, who had hurried after her daughter, "you're not going?"

Honora suddenly found herself without an excuse.

"I really ought to, Mrs. Holt. I've had such a good time—and I've been so interested. I never realized that such things occurred. And I've got one of the reports, which I intend to read over again."

"But my dear," protested Mrs. Holt, "you must meet some of the members of the Society. Bessie!"

Mrs. Grainger, indeed—for Honora had been right in her surmise—was standing within ear-shot of this conversation. And Honora, who knew she was there, could not help feeling that she took a rather redoubtable interest in it. At Mrs. Holt's words she turned.

"Bessie, I've found a new recruit—one that I can answer for. Mrs. Spence, whom I spoke to you about."

Mrs. Grainger bestowed upon Honora her enigmatic smile.

"Oh," she declared, "I've heard of Mrs. Spence from other sources, and I've seen her, too."

Honora grew a fiery red. There was obviously no answer to such a remark, which seemed the quintessence of rudeness. But Mrs. Grainger continued to smile, and to stare at her with the air of trying to solve a riddle.

"I'm coming to see you, if I may," she said. "I've been intending to since I've been in town, but I'm always so busy that I don't get time to do the things I want to do."

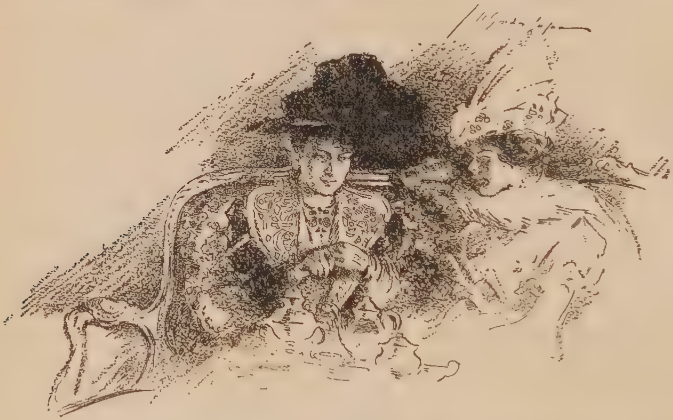
An announcement that fairly took away Honora's breath. She managed to express her appreciation of Mrs. Grainger's intention, and presently found herself walking rapidly up-town through swirling snow, somewhat dazed by the events of the afternoon. And these, by the way, were not yet finished. As she reached her own door, a voice vaguely familiar called her name.

"Honora!"

She turned. The slim, tall figure of a young woman descended from a carriage and crossed the pavement, and in the soft light of the vestibule she recognized Ethel Wing.

"I'm so glad I caught you," said that young lady when they entered the drawing-room. And she gazed at her school friend. The colour glowed in Honora's cheeks, but health alone could not account for the sparkle in her eyes. "Why, you look radiant. You are more beautiful than you were at Sutcliffe. Is it marriage?"

Honora laughed happily, and they sat down side by side on the lounge behind the tea table.



"I heard you'd married," said Ethel, "but I didn't know what had become of you until the other day. Jim never tells me anything. It appears that he's seen something of you. But it wasn't from Jim that I heard about you first. You'd never guess who told me you were here."

"Who?" asked Honora, curiously.

"Mr. Erwin."

"Peter Erwin!"

"I'm perfectly shameless," proclaimed Ethel Wing. "I've lost my heart to him, and I don't care who knows it. Why in the world didn't *you* marry him?"

"But — where did you see him?" Honora demanded as soon as she could command herself sufficiently to speak. Her voice must have sounded odd. Ethel did not appear to notice that.

"He lunched with us one day when father had gout. Didn't he tell you about it? He said he was coming to see you that afternoon."

"Yes—he came. But he didn't mention being at lunch at your house."

"I'm sure that was like him," declared her friend. And for the first time in her life Honora experienced a twinge of that world-old ailment—jealousy. How did Ethel know what was like him? "I made father give him up for a little while after lunch, and he talked about you the whole time. But he was most interesting at the table," continued Ethel, sublimely unconscious of the lack of compliment in the comparison; "as Jim would say, he fairly wiped up the ground with father, and it isn't an easy thing to do."

"Wiped up the ground with Mr. Wing!" Honora repeated.

"Oh, in a delightfully quiet, humorous way. That's what made it so effective. I couldn't understand all of it, but I grasped enough to enjoy it hugely. Father's so used to bullying people that it's become second nature with him. I've seen him lay down the law to some of the biggest lawyers in New York, and they took it like little lambs. He caught a Tartar in Mr. Erwin. I didn't dare to laugh, but I wanted to."

"What was the discussion about?" asked Honora.

"I'm not sure that I can give you a very clear idea of it," said Ethel. "Generally speaking, it was about modern trust methods, and what a self-respecting lawyer would do and what he wouldn't. Father took the ground that the laws weren't logical, and that they were different and conflicting, anyway, in different States. He said they impeded the natural development of business, and that it was justifiable for the great legal brains of the country to devise means by which these laws could be eluded. He didn't quite say that, but he meant it, and he honestly believes it. The manner in which Mr. Erwin refuted it was a revelation to me. I've been thinking about it since. You see, I'd never heard that side of the argument. Mr. Erwin said, in the nicest way possible, but very firmly, that a lawyer who hired himself out to enable one man to take advantage of another prostituted his talents: that the brains of the legal profession were out of politics in these days, and that it was almost impossible for the men in the legislatures to frame laws that couldn't be evaded by clever and unscrupulous devices. He cited ever so many cases . . ."

Ethel's voice became indistinct, as though some one had shut a door in front of it. Honora was trembling on the brink of a discovery: holding herself back from it, as one who has climbed a fair mountain recoils from the lip of an unsuspected crater at sight of the lazy, sulphurous fumes. All the years of her marriage, ever since she had first heard his name, the stature of James Wing had been insensibly growing, and the vastness of his empire gradually disclosed. She had lived in that empire: in it his word had stood for authority, his genius had been worshipped, his decrees had been absolute.

She had met him once, in Howard's office, when he had greeted her gruffly, and the memory of his rugged features and small red eyes, like live coals, had remained. And she saw now the drama that had taken place before Ethel's eyes. The capitalist, overbearing, tyrannical, hearing a few, simple truths in his own house from Peter—her Peter. And she recalled her husband's account of his talk with James Wing. Peter had refused to sell himself. Had Howard? Many times during the days that followed she summoned her courage to ask her husband that question, and kept silence. She did not wish to know.

"I don't want to seem disloyal to papa," Ethel was saying. "He is under great responsibilities to other people, to stockholders; and he must get things done. But oh, Honora, I'm so tired of money, money, money and its standards, and the things people are willing to do for it. I've seen too much."

Honora looked at her friend, and believed her. One glance at the girl's tired eyes — a weariness somehow enhanced in effect by the gold sheen of her hair — confirmed the truth of her words.

"You've changed, Ethel, since Sutcliffe," she said.

"Yes, I've changed," said Ethel Wing, and the weariness was in her voice, too. "I've had too much, Honora. Life was all glitter, like a Christmas tree, when I left Sutcliffe. I had no heart. I'm not at all sure that I have one now. I've known all kinds of people — except the right kind. And if I were to tell you some of the things that have happened to me in five years you wouldn't believe them. Money has been at the bottom of it all, — it ruined my brother, and it has ruined me. And then, the other day, I beheld a man whose standards simply take no account of money, a man who holds something else higher. I — I had been groping lately, and then I seemed to see clear for the first time in my life. But I'm afraid it comes too late."

Honora took her friend's hand in her own and pressed it.

"I don't know why I'm telling you all this," said Ethel. "It seems to-day as though I had always known you, and yet we weren't particularly intimate at school. I suppose I'm inclined to be over-suspicious. Heaven knows I've had enough to make me so. But I always thought that you were a little — ambitious. You'll forgive my frankness, Honora. I don't think you're at all so, now." She glanced at Honora suddenly. "Perhaps you've changed, too," she said.

Honora nodded.

"I think I'm changing all the time," she replied.

After a moment's silence, Ethel Wing pursued her own train of thought.

"Curiously enough when he — when Mr. Erwin spoke of you I seemed to get a very different idea of you than the one I had always had. I had to go out of town, but I made up my mind I'd come to see you as soon as I got back, and ask you to tell me something about him."

"What shall I tell you?" asked Honora. "He is — what you think he is, and more."

"Tell me something of his early life," said Ethel Wing.

There is a famous river in the western part of our country that disappears into a cañon, the walls of which are some thousands of feet high, and the bottom so narrow that the confined waters roar through it at breakneck speed. Sometimes they disappear entirely under the rock, to emerge again below more furiously than ever. From the river-bed can be seen, far, far above, a blue ribbon of sky. Once upon a time, not long ago, two heroes in the service of the government of the United States, whose names should be graven in the immortal rock and whose story read wherever the language is spoken, made the journey through this cañon and came out alive. That journey once started, there could be no turning back. Down and down they were buffeted by the rushing waters, over the falls and through the tunnels, with time to think only of that which would save them from immediate death, until they emerged into the sunlight of the plain below.

All of which by way of parallel. For our own chronicle, hitherto leisurely enough, is coming to its cañon — perhaps even now begins to feel the pressure of the shelving sides. And if our heroine be somewhat rudely tossed from one boulder to another, if we fail wholly to understand her emotions and her acts, we must blame the cañon. She had, indeed, little time to think.

One evening, three weeks or so after the conversation with Ethel Wing just related, Honora's husband entered her room as her maid was giving the finishing touches to her toilet.

"You're not going to wear that dress!" he exclaimed.

"Why not?" she asked, without turning from the mirror.

He lighted a cigarette.

"I thought you'd put on something handsome — to go to the Graingers'. And where are your jewels? You'll find the women there loaded with 'em."

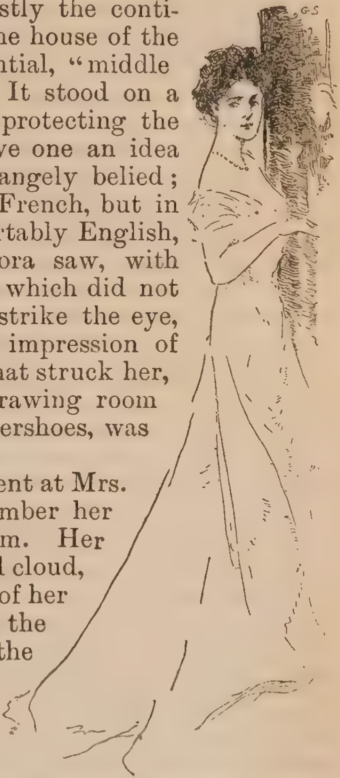
"One string of pearls is all I care to wear," said Honora — a reply with which he was fain to be content until they were in the carriage, when she added: "Howard, I must ask you as a favour not to talk that way before the servants."

"What way?" he demanded.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "if you don't know I suppose it is impossible to explain. You wouldn't understand."

"I understand one thing, Honora, that you're too confoundedly clever for me," he declared.

Honora did not reply. For at that moment they drew up at a carpet stretched across the pavement.



Unlike the mansions of vast and imposing façades that were beginning everywhere to catch the eye on Fifth Avenue, and that followed mostly the continental styles of architecture, the house of the Cecil Graingers had a substantial, "middle of-the-eighties" appearance. It stood on a corner, with a high iron fence protecting the area around it. Within, it gave one an idea of space that the exterior strangely belied; and it was furnished, not in a French, but in what might be called a comfortably English, manner. It was filled, Honora saw, with handsome and priceless things which did not immediately and aggressively strike the eye, but which somehow gave the impression of having always been there. What struck her, as she sat in the little withdrawing room while the maid removed her overshoes, was the note of permanence.

Some of those who were present at Mrs. Grainger's that evening remember her entrance into the drawing-room. Her gown, the colour of a rose-tinted cloud, set off the exceeding whiteness of her neck and arms and vied with the crimson in her cheeks, and the single glistening string of pearls about the slender column of her neck served as a contrast to the shadowy masses of her hair. Mr. Reginald Farwell, who was there, afterwards declared that she seemed to have stepped out of the gentle landscape of an old painting. She stood, indeed, hesitating for a moment in the doorway, her eyes softly alight, in the very pose of expectancy that such a picture suggested.

Honora herself was almost frightened by a sense of augury, of triumph, as she went forward to greet her hostess. Conversation, for the moment, had stopped. Cecil Grainger, with the air of one who had pulled aside the curtain and revealed this vision of beauty and innocence, crossed the room to welcome her. And Mrs. Grainger herself was not a little surprised; she was not a dramatic person, and it was not often that her drawing-room was the scene of even a mild sensation. No entrance could have been at once so startling and so unexceptionable as Honora's.

"I was sorry not to find you when I called," she said.

"I was sorry, too," replied Mrs. Grainger, regarding her with an interest that was undisguised, and a little embarrassing. "I'm scarcely ever at home, except when I'm with the children. Do you know these people?"

"I'm not sure," said Honora, "but — I must introduce my husband to you."

"How d'ye do!" said Mr. Grainger, blinking at her when this ceremony was accomplished. "I'm awfully glad to see you, Mrs. Spence, upon my word."

Honora could not doubt it. But he had little time to express his joy, because of the appearance of his wife at Honora's elbow with a tall man she had summoned from a corner.

"Before we go to dinner I must introduce my cousin, Mr. Chiltern — he is to have the pleasure of taking you out," she said.

His name was in the class of those vaguely familiar: vaguely familiar, too, was his face. An extraordinary face, Honora thought, glancing at it as she took his arm, although she was struck by something less tangible than the unusual features. He might have belonged to any nationality within the limits of the Caucasian race. His short, kinky, black hair suggested great virility, an effect intensified by a strongly bridged nose, sinewy hands, and bushy eyebrows. But the intangible distinction was in the eyes that looked out from under these brows: the glimpse she had of them as he bowed to her gravely, might be likened to the hasty reading of a chance page in a forbidden book. Her attention was arrested, her curiosity aroused. She was on that evening, so to speak, exposed for and sensitive to impressions. She was on the threshold of the Alhambra.

"Hugh has such a faculty," complained Mr. Grainger, "of turning up at the wrong moment!"

Dinner was announced. She took Chiltern's arm, and they fell into file behind a lady in yellow, with a long train, who looked at her rather hard. It was Mrs. Freddy Maitland. Her glance shifted to Chiltern, and it seemed to Honora that she started a little.

"Hello, Hugh," she said indifferently, looking back over her shoulder; "have you turned up again?"

"Still sticking to the same side of your horse, I see." he replied, ignoring the question. "I told you you'd get lop-sided."

The deformity, if there were any, did not seem to trouble her.

"I'm going to Florida Wednesday. We want another man. Think it over."

"Sorry, but I've got something else to do," he said.

"The devil and idle hands," retorted Mrs. Maitland.

Honora was sure as she could be that Chiltern was angry, although he gave no visible sign of this. It was as though the current ran from his arm into hers.

"Have you been away?" she asked.

"It seems to me as though I had never been anywhere else," he answered, and he glanced curiously at the guests ranging about the great, flower-laden table. They sat down.

She was a little repelled, a little piqued; and a little relieved when the man on her other side spoke to her, and she recognized Mr. Reginald Farwell, the architect. The table capriciously swung that way. She did not feel prepared to talk to Mr. Chiltern. And before entering upon her explorations she was in need of a guide. She could have found none more charming, none more impersonal, none more subtly aware of her wants (which had once been his) than Mr. Farwell. With his hair parted with geometrical precision from the back of his collar to his forehead, with his silky mustache and eyes of soft hazel lights, he was all things to all men and women — within reason. He was an achievement that civilization had not hitherto produced, a combination of the Beaux Arts and the Jockey Club and American adaptability. He was of those upon whom labour leaves no trace.

There were preliminaries, mutually satisfactory. To see Mrs. Spence was never to forget her, but more delicately intimated. He remembered to have caught a glimpse of her at the Quicksands Club, and Mrs. Dallam nor her house were not mentioned by either. Honora could not have been in New York long. No, it was her first winter, and she felt like a stranger. Would Mr. Farwell tell her who some of these people were? Nothing charmed Mr. Farwell so much as simplicity — when it was combined with personal attractions. He did not say so, but contrived to intimate the former.

"It's always difficult when one first comes to New York," he declared, "but it soon straightens itself out, and one is surprised at how few people there are, after all. We'll begin on Cecil's right. That's Mrs. George Grenfell."

"Oh, yes," said Honora, looking at a tall, thin woman of middle age who wore a tiara, and whose throat was covered with jewels. Honora did not imply that Mrs. Grenfell's name, and most of those that followed, were extremely familiar to her.

"In my opinion she's got the best garden in Newport, and she did most of it herself. Next to her, with the bald head, is Freddy Maitland. Next to him is Miss Godfrey. She's a little eccentric, but she can afford to be — the Godfreys for generations have done so much for the city. The man with the beard, next her, is John Laurens, the philanthropist. That pretty woman, who's just as nice as she looks, is Mrs. Victor Strange. She was Agatha Pendleton — Mrs. Grainger's cousin. And the gentleman with the pink face, whom she is entertaining —"

"Is my husband," said Honora, smiling. "I know something about him."

Mr. Farwell laughed. He admired her aplomb, and he did not himself change countenance. Indeed, the incident seemed rather to heighten the confidence between them. Honora was looking rather critically at Howard. It was a fact that his face did grow red at this stage of a dinner, and she wondered what Mrs. Strange found to talk to him about.

"And the woman on the other side of him?" she asked. "By the way, she has a red face, too."

"So she has," he replied amusedly. "That is Mrs. Littleton Pryor, the greatest living rebuke to the modern woman. Most of those jewels are inherited, but she has accustomed herself by long practice to carry them, as well as other burdens. She has eight children, and she's on every charity list. Her ancestors were the very roots of Manhattan. She looks like a Holbein — doesn't she?"

"And the extraordinary looking man on my right?" Honora asked. "I've got to talk to him presently."

"Chiltern!" he said. "Is it possible you haven't heard something about Hugh Chiltern?"

"Is it such lamentable ignorance?" she asked.

"That depends upon one's point of view," he replied. "He's always been a sort of a — well, Viking," said Farwell.

Honora was struck by the appropriateness of the word.

"Viking — yes, he looks it exactly. I couldn't think. Tell me something about him."

"Well," he laughed, lowering his voice a little, "here goes for a little rough and ready editing. One thing about Chiltern that's to be admired is that he's never cared a rap what people think. Of course, in a way, he never had to. His family own a section of the state, where they've had woollen mills for a hundred years, more or less. I believe Hugh Chiltern has sold 'em, or they've gone into a trust, or something, but the estate is still there, at Grenoble — one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen. The General — this man's father — was a violent, dictatorial man. There is a story about his taking a battery at Gettysburg which is almost incredible. But he went back to Grenoble after the war, and became the typical public-spirited citizen; built up the mills which his own pioneer grandfather had founded, and all that. He married an aunt of Mrs. Grainger's, — one of those delicate, gentle women who never dare to call their soul their own."

"And then?" prompted Honora, with interest.

"It's only fair to Hugh," Farwell continued, "to take his early years into account. The General never understood him, and his mother died before he went off to school. Men who were at Harvard with him say he has a brilliant mind, but he spent most of his time across the Charles River breaking things. It was, probably, the energy the General got rid of at Gettysburg. What Hugh really needed was a war, and he had too much money. He has a curious literary streak, I'm told, and wrote a rather remarkable article — I've forgotten just where it appeared. He raced a yacht for a while in a dare-devil, fiendish way, as one might expect; and used to go off on cruises and not be heard of for months. At last he got engaged to Sally Harrington — Mrs. Freddy Maitland."

Honora glanced across the table.

"Exactly," said Mr. Farwell. "That was seven or eight years ago. Nobody ever knew the reason why she broke it — though it may have been pretty closely guessed. He went away, and nobody's laid eyes on him until he turned up to-night."

Honora's innocence was not too great to enable her to read between the lines of this biography which Reginald Farwell had related with such praiseworthy delicacy. It was a biography, she well knew, that, like a score of others, had been guarded as jealously as possible within the circle on the borders of which she now found herself. Mrs. Grainger with her charities, Mrs. Littleton Pryor with her good works, Miss Godfrey with her virtue — all swallowed it as gracefully as possible. Noblesse oblige. Honora had read French and English memoirs, and knew that history repeats itself. And a biography that is printed in black letter and illuminated in gold is attractive in spite of its contents. The contents, indeed, our heroine had not found uninteresting, and she turned now to the subject with a flutter of anticipation.

He looked at her intently, almost boldly, she thought, and before she dropped her eyes she had made a discovery. The thing stamped upon his face and burning in his eyes was not world-weariness, disappointment, despair. She could not tell what it was, yet; that it was none of these, she knew. It was not unrelated to experience, but transcended it. There was an element of purpose in it, of determination, almost — she would have believed — of hope. That Mrs. Maitland nor any other woman was a part of it she became equally sure. Nothing could have been more commonplace than the conversation which began, and yet it held for her, between the lines as in the biography, the thrill of interest. She was a woman, and embarked on a voyage of discovery.

"Do you live in New York?" he asked.

"Yes," said Honora, "since this autumn."

"I've been away a good many years," he said, in explanation of his question. "I haven't quite got my bearings. I can't tell you how queerly this sort of thing affects me."

"You mean civilization?" she hazarded.

"Yes. And yet I've come back to it."

Of course she did not ask him why. Their talk was like the starting of a heavy train — a series of jerks; and yet both were aware of an irresistible forward traction. She had not recovered from her surprise in finding herself already so far in his confidence.

"And the time will come, I suppose, when you'll long to get away again."

"No," he said, "I've come back to stay. It's taken me a long while to learn it, but there's only one place for a man, and that's his own country."

Her eyes lighted.

"There's always so much for a man to do."

"What would you do?" he asked curiously.

She considered this.

"If you had asked me that question two years ago — even a year ago — I should have given you a different answer. It's taken me some time to learn it, too, you see, and I'm not a man. I once thought I should have liked to have been a king amongst money changers, and own railroad and steamship lines, and dominate men by sheer power."

He was clearly interested.

"And now?" he prompted her.

She laughed a little, to relieve the tension.

"Well — I've found out that there are some men that kind of power can't control — the best kind. And I've found out that that isn't the best kind of power. It seems to be a brutal, barbarous cunning power now that I've seen it at close range. There's another kind that springs from a man himself, that speaks through his works and acts, that influences first those around him, and then his community, convincing people of their own folly, and that finally spreads in ever widening circles to those whom he cannot see, and never will see."

She paused, breathing deeply, a little frightened at her own eloquence. Something told her that she was not only addressing her own soul — she was speaking to his.

"I'm afraid you'll think I'm preaching," she apologized.

"No," he said impatiently, "no."

"To answer your question, then, if I were a man of independent means, I think I should go into politics. And I should put on my first campaign banner the words, 'No Compromise.'"

It was a little strange that, until now — to-night — she had not definitely formulated these ambitions. The idea of the banner with its inscription had come as an inspiration. He did not answer, but sat regarding her, drumming on the cloth with his strong, brown fingers.

"I have learned this much in New York," she said, carried on by her impetus, "that men and women are like plants. To be useful, and to grow properly, they must be firmly rooted in their own soil. This city seems to me like a luxurious, overgrown hothouse. Of course," she added hastily, "there are many people who belong here, and whose best work is done here. I was thinking about those whom it attracts. And I have seen so many who are only watered and fed and warmed, and who become — distorted."

"It's extraordinary," replied Chiltern, slowly, "that you should say this to me. It is what I have come to believe, but I couldn't have said it half so well."

Mrs. Grainger gave the signal to rise. Honora took Chiltern's arm, and he led her back to the drawing-room. She was standing alone by the fire when Mrs. Maitland approached her.

"Haven't I seen you before?" she asked.

CHAPTER III

VINELAND

It was a pleasant Newport to which Honora went early in June, a fair city shining in the midst of summer seas, a place to light the fires of imagination. It wore at once an air of age, and of a new and sparkling unreality. Honora found in the very atmosphere a certain magic which she did not try to define, but to the enjoyment of which she abandoned herself; and in those first days after her arrival she took a sheer delight in driving about the island. Narrow Thames Street, crowded with gay carriages, with its aspect of the eighteenth and it shops of the twentieth century; the whiffs of the sea; Bellevue Avenue, with its glorious serried ranks of trees, its erring perfumes from bright gardens, its massed flowering shrubs beckoning the eye, its lawns of a truly enchanted green. Through tree and hedge, as she drove, came ever changing glimpses of gleaming palace fronts; glimpses that made her turn and look again; that stimulated but did not satisfy, and left a pleasant longing for something on the seeming verge of fulfilment.

The very stillness and solitude that seemed to envelop these palaces suggested the enchanter's wand. To-morrow, perhaps, the perfect lawns where the robins hopped amidst the shrubbery would become again the rock-bound, wind-swept New England pasture above the sea, and screaming gulls circle where now the swallows hovered about the steep blue roof of a French château. Hundreds of years hence, would these great pleasure houses still be standing behind their screens and walls and hedges? or would, indeed, the shattered, vine-covered marble of a balustrade alone mark the crumbling terraces whence once the fabled owners scanned the sparkling waters of the ocean? Who could say?

The onward rush of our story between its cañon walls compels us reluctantly to skip the narrative of the winter conquests of the lady who is our heroine. Popularity had not spoiled her, and the best proof of this lay in the comments of a world that is nothing if not critical. No beauty could have received with more modesty the triumph which had greeted her at Mrs. Grenfell's tableaux, in April, when she had appeared as Circe, in an architectural frame especially designed by Mr. Farwell himself. There had been a moment of hushed astonishment, followed by an acclaim that sent the curtain up twice again.

We must try to imagine, too, the logical continuation of that triumph in the Baiæ of our modern republic and empire, Newport. Open, Sesamê! seems, as ever, to be the countersign of her life. Even the palace gates swung wide to her: most of them with the more readiness because she had already passed through other gates — Mrs. Grainger's, for instance. Baiæ, apparently, is a topsy-turvy world in which, if one alights upside down, it is difficult to become righted. To alight upside down, is to alight in a palace. The Graingers did not live in one, but in a garden that existed before the palaces were, and one that the palace owners could not copy: a garden that three generations of Graingers, somewhat assisted by a remarkable climate, had made with loving care. The box was priceless, the spreading trees in the miniature park no less so, and time, the unbribeable, alone could now have produced the wide, carefully cherished Victorian mansion. Likewise not purchasable by California gold was a grandfather whose name had been written large in the pages of American history. His library was now lined with English sporting prints; but these, too, were old and mellow and rare.

To reach Honora's cottage, you turned away from the pomp and glitter and noise of Bellevue Avenue into the inviting tunnel of a leafy lane that presently stopped of itself. As though to provide against the contingency of a stray excursionist, a purple-plumed guard of old lilac trees massed themselves before the house, and seemed to look down with contempt on the new brick wall across the lane. *Odi profanum vulgus.* It was on account of the new brick wall, in fact, that Honora, through the intervention of Mrs. Grainger and Mrs. Shorter, had been able to obtain this most desirable of retreats, which belonged to a great-aunt of Miss Godfrey, Mrs. Forsythe.

Mr. Chamberlin, none other than he of whom we caught a glimpse some years ago in a castle near Silverdale, owned the wall and the grounds and the palace it enclosed. This gentleman was of those who arrive in Newport upside down; and was even now, with the somewhat doubtful assistance of his wife, making lavish and pathetic attempts to right himself. Newport had never forgiven him for the razing of a mansion and the felling of trees which had been landmarks, and for the driving out of Mrs. Forsythe. The mere sight of the modern wall had been too much for this lady — the lilacs and the leaves in the lane mercifully hid the palace — and after five and thirty peaceful summers she had moved out, and let the cottage. It was furnished with delightful old-fashioned things that seemed to express, at every turn, the aristocratic and uncompromising personality of the owner who had lived so long in their midst.

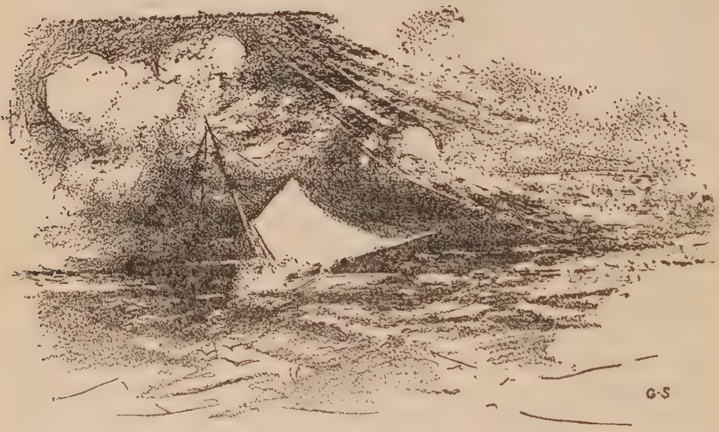
Mr. Chamberlin, who has nothing whatever to do with this chronicle except to have been the indirect means of Honora's installation, used to come through the wall once a week or so to sit for half an hour on her porch — as long as he ever sat anywhere. He had reddish side-whiskers, and he reminded her of a buzzing toy locomotive wound up tight and suddenly taken from the floor. She caught glimpses of him sometimes in the mornings buzzing around his gardeners, his painters, his carpenters, and his grooms. He would buzz the rest of his life, but nothing short of a revolution could take his possessions away. The Graingers and the Grenfells and the Stranges might move mountains, but not Mr. Chamberlin's house. Whatever heartburnings he may have had because certain people refused to come to his balls, he was in Newport to remain. He would sit under the battlements until the crack of doom; or rather — and more appropriate in Mr. Chamberlin's case — walk around them and around, blowing trumpets until they capitulated.

Honora magically found herself within them, and without a siege. Behold her at last in the setting for which we always felt she was destined. Why is it, in this world, that realization is so difficult a thing? Now that she is there, how shall we proceed to give the joys of her Elysium their full value? Not, certainly, by repeating the word *pleasure* over and over again: not by describing the palaces at which she lunched and danced and dined, or the bright waters in which she bathed, or the yachts in which she sailed. During the week, indeed, she moved untrammelled in a world with which she found herself in perfect harmony: it was new, it was dazzling, it was unexplored. During the week it possessed still another and more valuable attribute — it was real. And she, Honora Leffingwell Spence, was part and parcel of its permanence. The life relationships of the people by whom she was surrounded became her own. She had little time for thought — during the week.

We are dealing, now, in emotions as delicate as cloud shadows, and these drew on as Saturday approached. On Saturdays and Sundays the quality and texture of life seemed to undergo a change. Who does not recall the Monday mornings of the school days of youth, and the indefinite feeling betwixt sleep and waking that to-day would not be as yesterday or the day before? On Saturday mornings, when she went downstairs, she was wont to find the porch littered with newspapers and her husband lounging in a wicker chair behind the disapproving lilacs. Although they had long ceased to bloom, their colour was purple — his was pink.

Honora did not at first analyze or define these emotions, and was conscious only of a stirring within her, and a change. Reality became unreality. The house in which she lived, and for which she felt a passion of ownership, was for two days a rented house. Other women in Newport had week-end guests in the guise of husbands, and some of them went so far as to bewail the fact. Some had got rid of them. Honora kissed hers dutifully, and picked up the newspapers, drove him to the beach, and took him out to dinner, where he talked oracularly of finance. On Sunday night he departed, without visible regrets, for New York.

One Monday morning a storm was raging over Newport. Seized by a sudden whim, she rang her bell, breakfasted at an unusual hour, and nine o'clock found her, with her skirts flying, on the road above the cliffs that leads to the Fort. The wind had increased to a gale, and as she stood on the rocks the harbour below her was full of tossing white yachts straining at their anchors. Serene in the midst of all this hubbub lay a great grey battleship.



Presently, however, her thoughts were distracted by the sight of something moving rapidly across her line of vision. A sloop yacht, with a ridiculously shortened sail, was coming in from the Narrows, scudding before the wind like a frightened bird. She watched its approach in a sort of fascination, for of late she had been upon the water enough to realize that the feat of which she was witness was not without its difficulties. As the sloop drew nearer she made out a bare-headed figure bent tensely at the wheel, and four others clinging to the yellow deck. In a flash the boat had rounded to, the mainsail fell, and a veil of spray hid the actors of her drama. When it cleared the yacht was tugging like a wild thing at its anchor.

That night was Mrs. Grenfell's ball, and many times in later years has the scene come back to Honora. It was not a large ball, by no means on the scale of Mr. Chamberlin's, for instance. The great room reminded one of the gallery of a royal French château, with its dished ceiling, in the oval of which the colours of a pastoral fresco glowed in the ruby lights of the heavy chandeliers; its grey panelling, hidden here and there by tapestries, and its series of deep, arched windows that gave glimpses of a lantern-hung terrace. Out there, beyond a marble balustrade, the lights of fishing schooners tossed on a blue-black ocean. The same ocean on which she had looked that morning, and which she heard now, in the intervals of talk and laughter, crashing against the cliffs, — although the wind had gone down. Like a woman stirred to the depths of her being, its bosom was heaving still at the memory of the passion of the morning.

This night after the storm was capriciously mild, the velvet gown of heaven sewn with stars. The music had ceased, and supper was being served at little tables on the terrace. The conversation was desultory.

"Who is that with Reggie Farwell?" Ethel Wing asked.

"It's the Farrenden girl," replied Mr. Cuthbert, whose business it was to know everybody. "Chicago wheat. She looks like Ceres, doesn't she? Quite becoming to Reggie's dark beauty. She was sixteen, they tell me, when the old gentleman emerged from the pit, and they packed her off to a convent by the next steamer. Reggie may have the blissful experience of living in one of his own houses if he marries her."

The fourth at the table was Ned Carrington, who had been first secretary at an Embassy, and he had many stories to tell of ambassadors who spoke commercial American and asked royalties after their wives. Some one had said about him that he was the only edition of the Almanach de Gotha that included the United States. He somewhat resembled a golden seal emerging from a cold bath, and from time to time screwed an eyeglass into his eye and made a careful survey of Mrs. Grenfell's guests.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "Isn't that Hugh Chiltern?"

Honora started, and followed the direction of Mr. Carrington's glance. At sight of him, a vivid memory of the man's personality possessed her.

"Yes," Cuthbert was saying, "that's Chiltern sure enough. He came in on Dicky Farnham's yacht this morning from New York."

"This morning!" said Ethel Wing. "Surely not! No yacht could have come in this morning."

"Nobody but Chiltern would have brought one in, you mean," he corrected her. "He sailed her. They say Dicky was half dead with fright, and wanted to put in anywhere. Chiltern sent him below and kept right on. He has a devil in him, I believe. By the way, that's Dicky Farnham's ex-wife he's talking to — Adèle. She keeps her good looks, doesn't she? What's happened to Rindge?"

"Left him on the other side, I hear," said Carrington. "Perhaps she'll take Chiltern next. She looked as though she were ready to. And they say it's easier every time."

"C'est le second mari qui coûte," paraphrased Cuthbert, tossing his cigar over the balustrade. The strains of a waltz floated out of the windows, the groups at the tables broke up, and the cotillon began.

As Honora danced, Chiltern remained in the back of her mind, or rather an indefinite impression was there which in flashes she connected with him. She wondered, at times, what had become of him, and once or twice she caught herself scanning the bewildering, shifting sheen of gowns and jewels for his face. At last she saw him by the windows, holding a favour in his hand, coming in her direction. She looked away, towards the red uniforms of the Hungarian band on the raised platform at the end of the room. He was standing beside her.

"Do you remember me, Mrs. Spence?" he asked.

She glanced up at him and smiled. He was not a person one would be likely to forget, but she did not say so.

"I met you at Mrs. Grainger's," was what she said.

He handed her the favour. She placed it amongst the collection at the back of her chair and rose, and they danced. Was it dancing? The music throbbed; nay, the musicians seemed suddenly to have been carried out of themselves, and played as they had not played before. Her veins were filled with pulsing fire as she was swung, guided, carried out of herself by the extraordinary virility of the man who held her. She had tasted mastery.

"Thank you," she faltered, as they came around the second time to her seat.

He released her.

"I stayed to dance with you," he said. "I had to await my opportunity."

"It was kind of you to remember me," she replied, as she went off with Mr. Carrington.

A moment later she saw him bidding good night to his hostess. His face, she thought, had not lost that strange look of determination that she recalled. And yet — how account for his recklessness?

"Rum chap, Chiltern," remarked Carrington. "He might be almost anything, if he only knew it."

In the morning, when she awoke, her eye fell on the cotillon favours scattered over the lounge. One amongst them stood out — a silver-mounted pin-cushion. Honora arose, picked it up contemplatively, stared at it awhile, and smiled. Then she turned to her window, breathing in the perfumes, gazing out through the horse-chestnut leaves at the green, shadow-dappled lawn below.

On her breakfast tray, amidst some invitations, was a letter from her uncle. This she opened first.

"Dear Honora," he wrote, "amongst your father's papers, which have been in my possession since his death, was a certificate for three hundred shares in a land company. He bought them for very little, and I had always thought them worthless. It turns out that these holdings are in a part of the state of Texas that is now being developed; on the advice of Mr. Isham and others I have accepted an offer of thirty dollars a share, and I enclose a draft on New York for nine thousand dollars. I need not dwell upon the pleasure it is for me to send you this legacy from your father. And I shall only add the counsel of an old uncle, to invest this money by your husband's advice in some safe securities." . . .

Honora put down the letter, and sat staring at the cheque in her hand. Nine thousand dollars — and her own! Her first impulse was to send it back to her uncle. But that would be, she knew, to hurt his feelings — he had taken such a pride in handing her this inheritance. She read the letter again, and resolved that she would not ask Howard to invest the money. This, at least, should be her very own, and she made up her mind to take it to a bank in Thames Street that morning.

While she was still under the influence of the excitement aroused by the unexpected legacy, Mrs. Shorter came in, a lady with whom Honora's intimacy had been of steady growth. The tie between them might perhaps have been described as intellectual, for Elsie Shorter professed only to like people who were "worth while." She lent Honora French plays, discussed them with her, and likewise a wider range of literature, including certain brightly bound books on evolution and sociology.

In the eighteenth century, Mrs. Shorter would have had a title and a salon in the Faubourg: in the twentieth, she was the wife of a most fashionable and successful real estate agent in New York, and was aware of no incongruity. Bourgeoise was the last thing that could be said of her; she was as ready as a Georges Sand to discuss the whole range of human emotions; which she did many times a week with certain gentlemen of intellectual bent who had the habit of calling on her. She had never, to the knowledge of her acquaintances, been shocked. But while she believed that a great love carried, mysteriously concealed in its flame, its own pardon, she had through some fifteen years of married life remained faithful to Jerry Shorter: who was not, to say the least, a Lochinvar or a Roland. Although she had had nervous prostration and was thirty-four, she was undeniably pretty. She was of the suggestive, and not the strong-minded type, and the secret of her strength with the other sex was that she was in the habit of submitting her opinions for their approval.

"My dear," she said to Honora, "you may thank heaven that you are still young enough to look beautiful in negligée. How far have you got? Have you guessed of which woman Vivarce was the lover? And isn't it the most exciting play you've ever read? Ned Carrington saw it in Paris, and declares it frightened him into being good for a whole week!"

"Oh, Elsie," exclaimed Honora, apologetically, "I haven't read a word of it."

Mrs. Shorter glanced at the pile of favours.

"How was the dance?" she asked. "I was too tired to go. Hugh Chiltern offered to take me."

"I saw Mr. Chiltern there. I met him last winter at the Graingers'."

"He's staying with us," said Mrs. Shorter; "you know he's a sort of cousin of Jerry's, and devoted to him. He turned up yesterday morning on Dicky Farnham's yacht, in the midst of all that storm. It appears that Dicky met him in New York, and Hugh said he was coming up here, and Dicky offered to sail him up. When the storm broke they were just outside, and all on board lost their heads, and Hugh took charge and sailed in. Dicky told me that himself."

"Then it wasn't — recklessness," said Honora, involuntarily. But Mrs. Shorter did not appear to be surprised by the remark.

"That's what everybody thinks, of course," she answered.

"They say that he had a chance to run in somewhere, and browbeat Dicky into keeping on for Newport at the risk of their lives. They do Hugh an injustice. He might have done that some years ago, but he's changed."

Curiosity got the better of Honora.

"Changed?" she repeated.

"Of course you didn't know him in the old days, Honora," said Mrs. Shorter. "You wouldn't recognize him now. I've seen a good deal of men, but his is the most interesting and astounding transformation I've ever known."

"How?" asked Honora. She was sitting before the glass, with her hand raised to her hair.

Mrs. Shorter appeared puzzled.

"That's what interests me," she said. "My dear, don't you think life tremendously interesting? I do. I wish I could write a novel. Between ourselves, I've tried. I had Mr. Deming send it to a publisher, who said it was clever, but had no plot. If I only could get a plot!"

Honora laughed.

"How would 'The Transformation of Mr. Chiltern' do, Elsie?"

"If I only knew what's happened to him, and how he's going to end!" sighed Mrs. Shorter.

"You were saying," said Honora, for her friend seemed to have relapsed into a contemplation of this problem, "you were saying that he had changed."

"He goes away for seven years, and he suddenly turns up filled with ambition and a purpose in life, something he had never dreamed of. He's been at Grenoble, where the Chiltern estate is, making improvements and preparing to settle down there. And he's actually getting ready to write a life of his father, the General — that's the most surprising thing! They never met but to strike fire while the General was alive. It appears that Jerry and Cecil Grainger and one or two other people have some of the old gentleman's letters, and that's the reason why Hugh's come to Newport. And the strangest thing about it, my dear," added Mrs. Shorter, inconsequently, "is that I don't think it's a love affair."

Honora laughed again. It was the first time she had ever heard Mrs. Shorter attribute unusual human phenomena to any other source.

" He wrote Jerry that he was coming back to live on the estate, — from England. And he wasn't there a week. I can't think where he's seen any women — that is," Mrs. Shorter corrected herself hastily, " of his own class. He's been in the jungle — India, Africa, Corea. That was after Sally Harrington broke the engagement. And I'm positive he's not still in love with Sally. She lunched with me yesterday, and I watched him. Oh, I should have known it. But Sally hasn't got over it. It wasn't a grand passion with Hugh. I don't believe he's ever had such a thing. Not that he isn't capable of it — on the contrary, he's one of the few men I can think of who is."

At this point in the conversation Honora thought that her curiosity had gone far enough.

CHAPTER IV

THE VIKING

SHE was returning on foot from the bank in Thames Street, where she had deposited her legacy, when she met him who had been the subject of her conversation with Mrs. Shorter. And the encounter seemed — and was — the most natural thing in the world. She did not stop to ask herself why it was so fitting that the Viking should be a part of Vineland: why his coming should have given it the one and final needful touch. For that designation of Reginald Farwell's had come back to her. Despite the fact that Hugh Chiltern had with such apparent resolution set his face towards literature and the tillage of the land, it was as the Viking still that her imagination pictured him. By these tokens we may perceive that this faculty of our heroine's has been at work, and her canvas already sketched in.

Whether by design or accident he was at the leafy entrance of her lane she was not to know. She spied him standing there; and in her leisurely approach a strange conceit of reincarnation possessed her, and she smiled at the contrast thus summoned up. Despite the jingling harnesses of Bellevue Avenue and the background of Mr. Chamberlin's palace wall; despite the straw hat and white trousers and blue double-breasted serge coat in which he was conventionally arrayed, he was the sea fighter still — of all the ages. M. Vipsanius Agrippa, who had won an empire for Augustus, had just such a head.

Their greeting, too, was conventional enough, and he turned and walked with her up the lane, and halted before the lilacs.

"You have Mrs. Forsythe's house," he said. "How well I remember it! My mother used to bring me here years ago."

"Won't you come in?" asked Honora, gently.

He seemed to have forgotten her as they mounted in silence to the porch, and she watched him with curious feelings as he gazed about him, and peered through the windows into the drawing-room.

"It's just as it was," he said. "Even the furniture. I'm glad you haven't moved it. They used to sit over there in the corner, and have tea on the ebony table. And it was always dark — just as it is now. I can see them. They wore dresses with wide skirts and flounces, and queer low collars and bonnets. And they talked in subdued voices — unlike so many women in these days."

She was a little surprised, and moved, by the genuine feeling with which he spoke.

"I was most fortunate to get the house," she answered. "And I have grown to love it. Sometimes it seems as though I had always lived here."

"Then you don't envy *that*," he said, flinging his hand towards an opening in the shrubbery which revealed a glimpse of one of the pilasters of the palace across the way. The instinct of tradition which had been the cause of Mrs. Forsythe's departure was in him, too. He, likewise, seemed to belong to the little house as he took one of the wicker chairs.

"Not," said Honora, "when I can have this."

She was dressed in white, her background of lilac leaves. Seated on the railing, with the tip of one toe resting on the porch, she smiled down at him from under the shadows of her wide hat.

"I didn't think you would," he declared. "This place seems to suit you, as I imagined you. I have thought of you often since we first met last winter."

"Yes," she replied hastily, "I am very happy here. Mrs. Shorter tells me you are staying with them."

"When I saw you again last night," he continued, ignoring her attempt to divert the stream from his channel, "I had a vivid impression as of having just left you. Have you ever felt that way about people?"

"Yes," she admitted, and poked the toe of her boot with her parasol.

"And then I find you in this house, which has so many associations for me. Harmoniously here," he added, "if you know what I mean. Not a newcomer, but some one who must always have been logically expected."

She glanced at him quickly, with parted lips. It was she who had done most of the talking at Mrs. Grainger's dinner; and the imaginative quality of mind he was now revealing was unlooked for. She was surprised not to find it out of character. It is a little difficult to know what she expected of him, since she did not know herself: the methods, perhaps, of the Viking in Longfellow's poem. She was aware, at least, that she had attracted him, and she was beginning to realize it was not a thing that could be done lightly. This gave her a little flutter of fear.

"Are you going to be long in Newport?" she asked.

"I am leaving on Friday," he replied. "It seems strange to be here again after so many years. I find I've got out of touch with it. And I haven't a boat, although Farnham's been kind enough to offer me his."

"I can't imagine you, somehow, without a boat," she said, and added hastily: "Mrs. Shorter was speaking of you this morning, and said that you were always on the water when you were here. Newport must have been quite different then."

He accepted the topic, and during the remainder of his visit she succeeded in keeping the conversation in the middle ground, although she had a sense of the ultimate futility of the effort; a sense of pressure being exerted, no matter what she said. She presently discovered, however, that the taste for literature attributed to him — which had seemed so incongruous — existed. He spoke with a new fire when she led him that way, albeit she suspected that some of the fuel was derived from the revelation that she shared his liking for books. As the extent of his reading became gradually disclosed, however, her feeling of inadequacy grew, and she resolved in the future to make better use of her odd moments. On her table, in two green volumes, was the life of a Massachusetts statesman that Mrs. Shorter had lent her. She picked it up after Chiltern had gone. He had praised it.

He left behind him a blurred portrait on her mind, as that of two men superimposed. And only that morning she had had such a distinct impression of one. It was from a consideration of this strange phenomenon, with her book lying open in her lap, that her maid aroused her to go to Mrs. Pryor's. This was Tuesday.

Some of the modern inventions we deem most marvellous have been fitted for ages to man and woman. Woman, particularly, possesses for instance a kind of submarine bell; and, if she listens, she can at times hear it tinkling faintly. And the following morning, Wednesday, Honora heard hers when she received an invitation to lunch at Mrs. Shorter's. After a struggle, she refused, but Mrs. Shorter called her up over the telephone, and she yielded.

"I've got Alfred Deming for myself," said Elsie Shorter, as she greeted Honora in the hall. "He writes those very clever things — you've read them. And Hugh for you," she added significantly.

The Shorter cottage, though commodious, was simplicity itself. From the vine-covered pergola where they lunched they beheld the distant sea like a lavender haze across the flats. And Honora wondered whether there were not an element of truth in what Mr. Deming said of their hostess — that she thought nothing immoral except novels with happy endings. Chiltern did not talk much: he looked at Honora.

"Hugh has got so serious," said Elsie Shorter, "that sometimes I'm actually afraid of him. You ought to have done something to be as serious as that, Hugh."

"Done something!"

"Written the 'Origin of Species,' or founded a new political party, or executed a coup d'état. Half the time I'm under the delusion that I'm entertaining a celebrity under my roof, and I wake up and it's only Hugh."

"It's because he looks as though he might do any of those things," suggested Mr. Deming. "Perhaps he may."

"Oh," said Elsie Shorter, "the men who do them are usually little wobbly specimens."

Honora was silent, watching Chiltern. At times the completeness of her understanding of him gave her an uncanny sensation, and again she failed to comprehend him at all. She felt his anger go to a white heat, but the others seemed blissfully unaware of the fact. The arrival of coffee made a diversion.

"You and Hugh may have the pergola, Honora. I'll take Mr. Deming into the garden."

"I really ought to go in a few minutes, Elsie," said Honora.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Shorter. "If it's bridge at the Playfairs', I'll telephone and get you out of it."

"No—"

"Then I don't see where you can be going," declared Mrs. Shorter, and departed with her cavalier.

"Why are you so anxious to get away?" asked Chiltern, abruptly.

Honora coloured.

"Oh—did I seem so? Elsie has such a mania for pairing people off—sometimes it's quite embarrassing."

"She was a little rash in assuming that you'd rather talk to me," he said, smiling.

"You were not consulted, either."

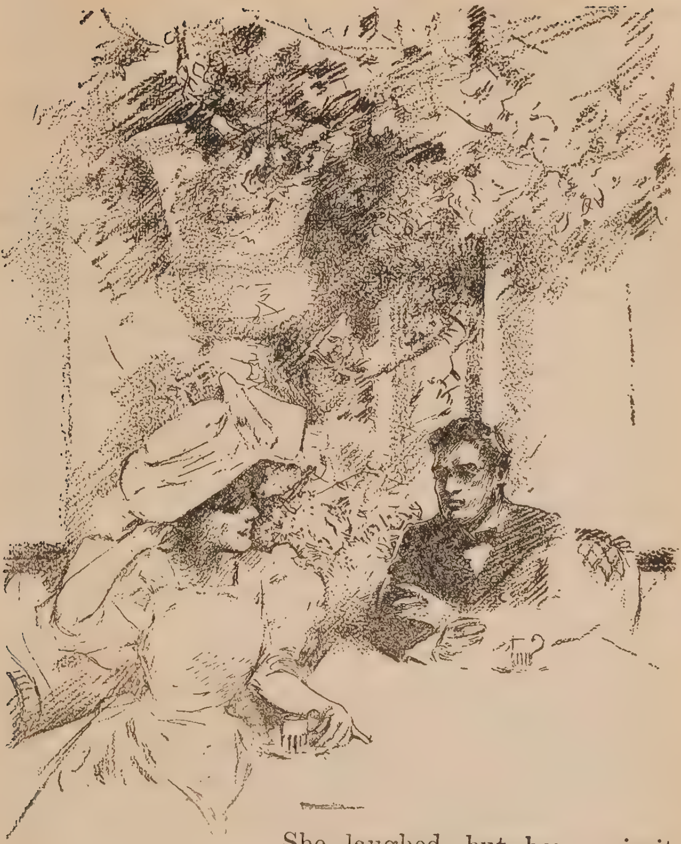
"I was consulted before lunch," he replied.

"You mean—?"

"I mean that I wanted you," he said. She had known it, of course. The submarine bell had told her. And he could have found no woman in Newport who would have brought more enthusiasm to his aid than Elsie Shorter.

"And you usually get what you want," she retorted with a spark of rebellion.

"Yes," he admitted. "Only hitherto I haven't wanted very desirable things."



She laughed, but her curiosity got the better of her.

"Hitherto," she said, "you have just taken what you desired."

From the smouldering fires in his eyes darted an arrow-point of flame.

"What kind of a man are you?" she asked, throwing the impersonal to the winds. "Somebody called you a Viking once."

"Who?" he demanded.

"It doesn't matter. I'm beginning to think the name singularly appropriate. It wouldn't be the first time one landed in Newport, according to legend," she added.

"I haven't read the poem since childhood," said Chiltern, looking at her fixedly, "but he became—domesticated, if I remember rightly."

"Yes," she admitted, "the impossible happened to him, as it usually does in books. And then, circumstances helped. There were no other women."

"When the lady died," said Chiltern, "he fell upon his spear."

"The final argument for my theory," declared Honora.

"On the contrary," he maintained, smiling, "it proves there is always one woman for every man—if he can find her. If this man had lived in modern times, he would probably have changed from a Captain Kidd into a useful citizen of the kind you once said you admired."

"Is a woman necessary," she asked, "for the transformation?"

He looked at her so intently that she blushed to the hair clustering at her temples. She had not meant that her badinage should go so deep.

"It was not a woman," he said slowly, "that brought me back to America."

"Oh," she exclaimed, suffused, "I hope you won't think that curiosity"—and got no farther.

He was silent a moment, and when she ventured to glance up at him one of those enigmatical changes had taken place. He was looking at her gravely, though intently, and the Viking had disappeared.

"I wanted you to know," he answered. "You must have heard more or less about me. People talk. Naturally these things haven't been repeated to me, but I dare say many of them are true. I haven't been a saint, and I don't pretend to be now. I've never taken the trouble to deceive any one. And I've never cared, I'm sorry to say, what was said. But I'd like you to believe that when I agreed with—with the sentiments you expressed the first time I saw you, I was sincere. And I am still sincere."

"Indeed, I do believe it!" cried Honora.

His face lighted.

"You seemed different from the other women I had known — of my generation, at least," he went on steadily. "None of them could have spoken as you did. I had just landed that morning, and I should have gone direct to Grenoble, but there was some necessary business to be attended to in New York. I didn't want to go to Bessie's dinner, but she insisted. She was short of a man. I went. I sat next to you, and you interpreted my mind. It seemed too extraordinary not to have had a significance."

Honora did not reply. She felt instinctively that he was a man who was not wont ordinarily to talk about his affairs. Beneath his speech was an undercurrent — or undertow, perhaps — carrying her swiftly, easily, helpless into the deep waters of intimacy. For the moment she let herself go without a struggle. Her silence was of a breathless quality which he must have felt.

"And I am going to tell you why I came home," he said. "I have spoken of it to nobody, but I wish you to know that it had nothing to do with any ordinary complication these people may invent. Nor was there anything supernatural about it: what happened to me, I suppose, is as old a story as civilization itself. I'd been knocking about the world for a good many years, and I'd had time to think. One day I found myself in the interior of China with a few coolies and a man who I suspect was a ticket-of-leave Englishman. I can see the place now — the yellow fog, the sand piled up against the wall like yellow snow. Desolation was a mild name for it. I think I began with a consideration of the Englishman who was asleep in the shadow of a tower. There was something inconceivably hopeless in his face in that ochre light. Then the place where I was born and brought up came to me with a startling completeness, and I began to go over my own life, step by step. To make a long story short, I perceived that what my father had tried to teach me, in his own way, had some reason in it. He was a good deal of a man. I made up my mind I'd come home and start in where I belonged. But I didn't do so right away — I finished the trip first, and lent the Englishman a thousand pounds to buy into a firm in Shanghai. I suppose," he added, "that is what is called suggestion. In my case it was merely the cumulative result of many reflections in waste places."

"And since then?"

"Since then I have been at Grenoble, making repairs and trying to learn something about agriculture. I've never been as happy in my life."

"And you're going back on Friday," she said.

He glanced at her quickly. He had detected the note in her speech: though lightly uttered, it was unmistakably a command. She tried to soften its effect in her next sentence.

"I can't express how much I appreciate your telling me this," she said. "I'll confess to you I wished to think that something of that kind had happened. I wished to believe that — that you had made this determination — alone. When I met you that night there was something about you I couldn't account for. I haven't been able to account for it until now."

She paused, confused, fearful that she had gone too far. A moment later she was sure of it. A look came into his eyes that frightened her.

"You've thought of me?" he said.

"You must know," she replied, "that you have an unusual personality — a striking one. I can go so far as to say that I remembered you when you reappeared at Mrs. Grenfell's —" she hesitated.

He rose, and walked to the far end of the tiled pavement of the pergola, and stood for a moment looking out over the sea. Then he turned to her.

"I either like a person or I don't," he said. "And I tell you frankly I have never met a woman whom I cared for as I do you. I hope you're not going to insist upon a probationary period of months before you decide whether you can reciprocate."

Here indeed was a speech in his other character, and she seemed to see, in a flash, his whole life in it. There was a touch of boyishness that appealed, a touch of insistent masterfulness that alarmed. She recalled that Mrs. Shorter had said of him that he had never had to besiege a fortress — the white flag had always appeared too quickly. Of course there was the mystery of Mrs. Maitland — still to be cleared up. It was plain, at least, that resistance merely made him unmanageable. She smiled.

"It seems to me," she said, "that in two days we have become astonishingly intimate."

"Why shouldn't we?" he demanded.

But she was not to be led into casuistry.

"I've been reading the biography you recommended," she said.

He continued to look at her a moment, and laughed as he sat down beside her. Later he walked home with her. A dinner and bridge followed, and it was after midnight when she returned. As her maid unfastened her gown she perceived that her pincushion had been replaced by the one she had received at the ball.

"Did you put that there, Mathilde?" she asked.

Mathilde had. She had seen it on madame's bureau, and thought madame wished it there. She would replace the old one at once.

"No," said Honora, "you may leave it, now."

"Bien, madame," said the maid, and glanced at her mistress, who appeared to have fallen into a revery.

It had seemed strange to her to hear people talking about him at the dinner that night, and once or twice her soul had sprung to arms to champion him, only to remember that her knowledge was special. She alone of all of them understood, and she found herself exulting in the superiority. The amazed comment when the heir to the Chiltern fortune had returned to the soil of his ancestors had been revived on his arrival in Newport. Ned Carrington, amid much laughter, had quoted the lines about Prince Hal:

> *"To mock the expectations of the world,*
> *To frustrate prophecies."*

Honora disliked Mr. Carrington,

Perhaps the events of Thursday would better be left in the confusion in which they remained in Honora's mind. She was awakened by penetrating, persistent, and mournful notes which for some time she could not identify, although they sounded oddly familiar; and it was not until she felt the dampness of the coverlet and looked at the white square of her open windows that she realized there was a fog. And it had not lifted when Chiltern came in the afternoon. They discussed literature — but the book had fallen to the floor. *Absit omen!* If printing had then been invented, undoubtedly there would have been a book instead of an apple in the third chapter of Genesis. He confided to her his plan of collecting his father's letters and of writing the General's life. Honora, too, would enjoy writing a book. Perhaps the thought of the pleasure of collaboration occurred to them both at once; it was Chiltern who wished that he might have her help in the difficult places; she had, he felt, the literary instinct. It was not the Viking who was talking now. And then, at last, he had risen reluctantly to leave. The afternoon had flown. She held out her hand with a frank smile.

"Good-by," she said. "Good-by, and good luck."

"But I may not go," he replied.

She stood dismayed.

"I thought you told me you were going on Friday — to-morrow."

"I merely set that as a probable date. I have changed my mind. There is no immediate necessity. Do you wish me to go?" he demanded.

She had turned away, and was straightening the books on the table.

"Why should I?" she said.

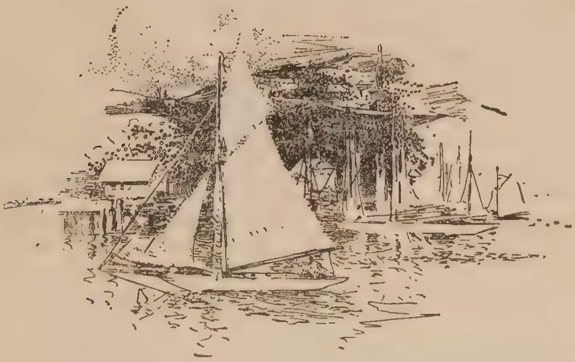
"You wouldn't object to my remaining a few days more?" He had reached the doorway.

"What have I to do with your staying?" she asked.

"Everything," he answered — and was gone.

She stood still. The feeling that possessed her now was rebellion, and akin to hate.

Her conduct, therefore, becomes all the more incomprehensible when we find her accepting, the next afternoon, his invitation to sail on Mr. Farnham's yacht, the *Folly*. It is true that the gods will not exonerate Mrs. Shorter. That lady, who had been bribed with Alfred Deming, used her persuasive powers; she might be likened to a skilful artisan who blew wonderful rainbow fabrics out of glass without breaking it; she blew the tender passion into a thousand shapes, and admired every one. Her criminal culpability consisted in forgetting the fact that it could not be trusted with children.



Nature seems to delight in contrasts. As though to atone for the fog she sent a dazzling day out of the northwest, and the summer world was stained in new colours. The yachts were whiter, the water bluer, the grass greener; the stern grey rocks themselves flushed with purple. The wharves were gay, and dark clustering foliage hid an enchanted city as the *Folly* glided between dancing buoys. Honora, with a frightened glance upward at the great sail, caught her breath. And she felt rather than saw the man beside her guiding her seaward.

A discreet expanse of striped yellow deck separated them from the wicker chairs where Mrs. Shorter and Mr. Deming were already established. She glanced at the profile of the Viking, and allowed her mind to dwell for an instant upon the sensations of that other woman who had been snatched up and carried across the ocean. Which was the quality in him that attracted her? his lawlessness, or his intellect and ambition? Never, she knew, had he appealed to her more than at this moment, when he stood, a stern figure at the wheel, and vouchsafed her nothing but commonplaces. This, surely, was his element.

Presently, however, the yacht slid out from the infolding land into an open sea that stretched before them to a silver-lined horizon. And he turned to her with a disconcerting directness, as though taking for granted a subtle understanding between them.

"How well you sail," she said, hurriedly.

"I ought to be able to do that, at least," he declared.

"I saw you when you came in the other day, although I didn't know who it was until afterwards. I was standing on the rocks near the Fort, and my heart was in my mouth."

He answered that the *Folly* was a good sea boat.

"So you decided to forgive me," he said.

"For what?"

"For staying in Newport."

Before accepting the invitation she had formulated a policy, cheerfully confident in her ability to carry it out. For his decision not to leave Newport had had an opposite effect upon her than that she had anticipated; it had oddly relieved the pressure. It had given her a chance to rally her forces; to smile, indeed, at an onslaught that had so disturbed her; to examine the matter in a more rational light. It had been a cause for self-congratulation that she had scarcely thought of him the night before. And to-day, in her blue veil and blue serge gown, she had boarded the *Folly* with her wits about her. She forgot that it was he who, so to speak, had the choice of ground and weapons.

"I have forgiven you. Why shouldn't I, when you have so royally atoned."

But he obstinately refused to fence. There was nothing apologetic in this man, no indirectness in his method of attack. Parry adroitly as she might, he beat down her guard. As the afternoon wore on there were silences, when Honora, by staring over the waters, tried to collect her thoughts. But the sea was his ally, and she turned her face appealingly toward the receding land. Fascination and fear struggled within her as she had listened to his onslaughts, and she was conscious of being moved by what he was, not by what he said. Vainly she glanced at the two representatives of an ironically satisfied convention, only to realize that they were absorbed in a milder but no less entrancing aspect of the same topic, and would not thank her for an interruption.

"Do you wish me to go away?" he asked at last abruptly, almost rudely.

"Surely," she said, "your work, your future isn't in Newport."

"You haven't answered my question."

"It's because I have no right to answer it," she replied. "Although we have known each other so short a time, I am your friend. You must realize that. I am not conventional. I have lived long enough to understand that the people one likes best are not necessarily those one has known longest. You interest me — I admit it frankly — I speak to you sincerely. I am even concerned that you shall find happiness, and I feel that you have the power to make something of yourself. What more can I say? It seems to me a little strange," she added, "that under the circumstances I should say so much. I can give no higher proof of my friendship."

He did not reply, but gave a sharp order to the crew. The sheet was shortened, and the *Folly* obediently headed westward against the swell, flinging rainbows from her bows as she ran. Mrs. Shorter and Deming returned at this moment from the cabin, where they had been on a tour of inspection.

"Where are you taking us, Hugh?" said Mrs. Shorter.

"Nowhere in particular," he replied.

"Please don't forget that I am having people to dinner to-night. That's all I ask. What have you done to him, Honora, to put him in such a humour?"

Honora laughed.

"I hadn't noticed anything peculiar about him," she answered.

"This boat reminds me of Adèle," said Mrs. Shorter. "She loved it. I can see how she could get a divorce from Dicky — but the *Folly!* She told me yesterday that the sight of it made her homesick, and Eustace Rindge won't leave Paris."

It suddenly occurred to Honora, as she glanced around the yacht, that Mrs. Rindge rather haunted her.

"So that is your answer," said Chiltern, when they were alone again.

"What other can I give you?"

"Is it because you are married?" he demanded.

She grew crimson.

"Isn't that an unnecessary question?"

"No," he declared. "It concerns me vitally to understand you. You were good enough to wish that I should find happiness. I have found the possibility of it — in you."

"Oh," she cried, "don't say such things!"

"Have you found happiness?" he asked.

She turned her face from him towards their shining wake. But he had seen that her eyes were filled with sudden tears.

"Forgive me," he pleaded; "I did not mean to be brutal. I said that because I felt as I have never in my life felt before. As I did not know I could feel. I can't account for it, but I ask you to believe me."

"I can account for it," she answered presently, with a strange gentleness. "It is because you met me at a critical time. Such — coincidences often occur in life. I happened to be a woman; and, I confess it, a woman who was interested. I could not have been interested if you had been less real, less sincere. But I saw that you were going through a crisis; that you might, with your powers, build up your life into a splendid and useful thing. And, womanlike, my instinct was to help you. I should not have allowed you to go on, but — but it all happened so quickly that I was bewildered. I — I do not understand it myself."

He listened hungrily, and yet at times with evident impatience.

"No," he said, "I cannot believe that it was an accident. It was you — "

She stopped him with an imploring gesture.

"Please," she said, "please let us go in."

Without an instant's hesitation he brought the sloop about and headed her for the light-ship on Brenton's reef, and they sailed in silence. Awhile she watched the sapphire waters break to dazzling whiteness under the westerning sun. Then, in an ecstasy she did not seek to question, she closed her eyes to feel more keenly the swift motion of their flight. *Why not?* The sea, the winds of heaven, had aided others since the dawn of history. Legend was eternally true. On these very shores happiness had awaited those who had dared to face primeval things.

She looked again, this time towards an unpeopled shore. No sentinel guarded the uncharted reefs, and the very skies were smiling, after the storm, at the scudding fates.

It was not until they were landlocked once more, and the *Folly* was reluctantly beating back through the Narrows, that he spoke again.

"So you wish me to go away?"

"I cannot see any use in your staying," she replied, "—after what you have said. I cannot see," she added in a low voice, "that for you to remain would be to promote the happiness of — either of us. You should have gone to-day."

"You care!" he exclaimed.

"It is because I do not wish to care that I tell you to go."

"And you refuse happiness?"

"It could be happiness for neither of us," said Honora. "The situation would be impossible. You are not a man who would be satisfied with moderation. You would insist upon having all. And you do not know what you are asking."

"I know that I want you," he said, "and that my life is won or lost with or without you."

"You have no right to say such a thing."

"We have each of us but one life to live."

"And one life to ruin," she answered. "See, you are running on the rocks!"

He swung the boat around.

"Others have rebuilt upon ruins," he declared.

She smiled at him.

"But you are taking my ruins for granted," she said. "You would make them first."

He relapsed into silence again. The *Folly* needed watching. Once he turned and spoke her name, and she did not rebuke him.

"Women have a clearer vision of the future than men," she began presently, "and I know you better than you know yourself. What — what you desire would not mend your life, but break it utterly. I am speaking plainly. As I have told you, you interest me; so far that is the extent of my feelings. I do not know whether they would go any farther, but on your account as well as my own I will not take the risk. We have come to an impasse. I am sorry. I wish we might have been friends, but what you have said makes it impossible. There is only one thing to do, and that is for you to go away."

He eased off his sheet, rounded the fort, and set a course for the moorings. The sun hung red above the silhouetted roofs of Conanicut, and a quaint tower in the shape of a minaret stood forth to cap the illusions of a day.

The wind was falling, the harbour quieting for the night, and across the waters, to the tones of a trumpet, the red bars of the battleship's flag fluttered to the deck. The *Folly*, making a wide circle, shot into the breeze, and ended by gliding gently up to the buoy.

CHAPTER V

THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

It was Saturday morning, but Honora had forgotten the fact. Not until she was on the bottom step did the odour of cigarettes reach her and turn her faint; and she clutched suddenly at the banisters. Thus she stood for a while, motionless, and then went quietly into the drawing-room. The French windows looking out on the porch were, as usual, open.

It was an odd sensation thus to be regarding one's husband objectively. For the first time he appeared to her definitely as a stranger; as much a stranger as the man who came once a week to wind Mrs. Forsythe's clocks. Nay, more. There was a sense of intrusion in this visit, of invasion of a life with which he had nothing to do. She examined him ruthlessly, very much as one might examine a burglar taken unawares. There was the inevitable shirt with the wide pink stripes, of the abolishment or even of the effective toning down of which she had long since despaired. On the contrary, like his complexion, they evinced a continual tendency towards a more aggressive colour. There was also the jewelled ring, now conspicuously held aloft on a fat little finger. The stripes appeared that morning as the banner of a hated suzerain, the ring as the emblem of his overlordship. He did not belong in that house; everything in it cried out for his removal; and yet it was, in the eyes of the law at least, his. By grace of that fact she was here, enjoying it. At that instant, as though in evidence of this, he laid down a burning cigarette on a mahogany stand he had had brought out to him. Honora seized an ash tray, hurried to the porch, and picked up the cigarette in the tips of her fingers.

"Howard, I wish you would be more careful of Mrs. Forsythe's furniture," she exclaimed.

"Hello, Honora," he said, without looking up. "I see by the Newport paper that old Maitland is back from Europe. Things are skyrocketing in Wall Street." He glanced at the ash tray, which she had pushed towards him. "What's the difference about the table? If the old lady makes a row, I'll pay for it."

"Some things are priceless," she replied; "you do not seem to realize that."

"Not this rubbish," said Howard. "Judging by the fuss she made over the inventory, you'd think it might be worth something."

"She has trusted us with it," said Honora. Her voice shook.

He stared at her.

"I never saw you look like that," he declared.

"It's because you never look at me closely," she answered.

He laughed, and resumed his reading. She stood awhile by the railing. Across the way, beyond the wall, she heard Mr. Chamberlin's shrill voice berating a gardener.

"Howard," she asked presently, "why do you come to Newport at all?"

"Why do I come to Newport?" he repeated. "I don't understand you."

"Why do you come up here every week?"

"Well," he said, "it isn't a bad trip on the boat, and I get a change from New York, and see men I shouldn't probably see otherwise." He paused and looked at her again, doubtfully. "Why do you ask such a question?"

"I wished to be sure," said Honora.

"Sure of what?"

"That the — arrangement suited you perfectly. You do not feel — the lack of anything, do you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You wouldn't care to stay in Newport all the time?"

"Not if I know myself," he replied. "I leave that part of it to you."

"What part of it?" she demanded.

"You ought to know. You do it pretty well," he laughed. "By the way, Honora, I've got to have a conference with Mr. Wing to-day, and I may not be home to lunch."

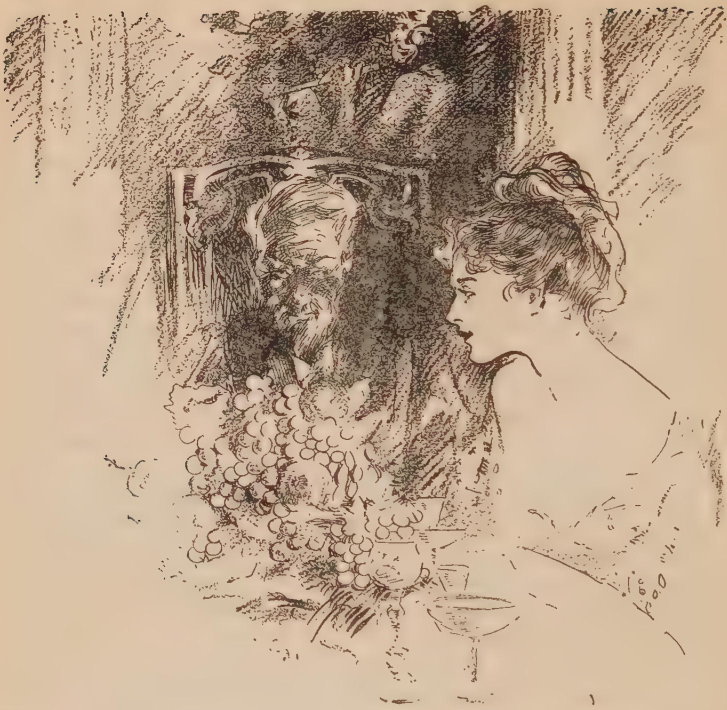
"We're dining there to-night," she told him, in a listless voice.

Upon Ethel Wing had descended the dominating characteristics of the elder James, who, whatever the power he might wield in Wall Street, was little more than a visitor in Newport. It was Ethel's house, from the hour she had swept the Reel and Carter plans (which her father had brought home) from the table and sent for Mr. Farwell. The forehanded Reginald arrived with a sketch, and the result, as every one knows, is one of the chief monuments to his reputation. So exquisitely proportioned is its simple, two-storied marble front as seen through the trees left standing on the old estate, that tourists, having beheld the Chamberlin and other mansions, are apt to think this niggardly for a palace. Two infolding wings, stretching towards the water, enclose a court, and through the slender white pillars of the peristyle one beholds in fancy the summer seas of Greece.

Looking out on the court, and sustaining this classic illusion, is a marble-paved dining room, with hangings of Pompeiian red, and frescoes of nymphs and satyrs and piping shepherds, framed between fluted pilasters, dimly discernible in the soft lights.

In the midst of these surroundings, at the head of his table, sat the great financier whose story but faintly concerns this chronicle; the man who, every day that he had spent down town in New York in the past thirty years, had eaten the same meal in the same little restaurant under the street. This he told Honora, on his left, as though it were not history. He preferred apple pie to the greatest of artistic triumphs of his daughter's chef, and had it; a glorified apple pie, with frills and furbelows, and whipped cream which he angrily swept to one side with contempt.

"That isn't apple pie," he said. "I'd like to take that



Frenchman to the little New England hill-town where I went to school and show him what apple pie is."

Such were the autobiographical snatches — by no means so crude as they sound — that reached her intelligence from time to time. Mr. Wing was too subtle to be crude; and he had married a Playfair, a family noted for good living. Honora did not know that he was fond of talking of that apple pie and the New England school at public banquets; nor did Mr. Wing suspect that the young woman whom he was apparently addressing, and who seemed to be hanging on his words, was not present.

It was not until she had put her napkin on the table that she awoke with a start and gazed into his face and saw written there still another history than the one he had been telling her. The face was hidden, indeed, by the red beard. What she read was in the little eyes that swept her with a look of possession: possession in a large sense, let it be emphasized, that an exact justice be done Mr. James Wing, —she was one of the many chattels over which his ownership extended; bought and paid for with her husband. A hot resentment ran through her at the thought.

Mr. Cuthbert, who was many kinds of a barometer, sought her out later in the courtyard.

"Your husband's feeling tiptop, isn't he?" said he. "He's been locked up with old Wing all day. Something's in the wind, and I'd give a good deal to know what it is."

"I'm afraid I can't inform you," replied Honora.

Mr. Cuthbert apologized.

"Oh, I didn't mean to ask you for a tip," he declared, quite confused. "I didn't suppose you knew. The old man is getting ready to make another killing, that's all. You don't mind my telling you you look stunning to-night, do you?"

Honora smiled.

"No, I don't mind," she said.

Mr. Cuthbert appeared to be ransacking the corners of his brain for words.

"I was watching you to-night at the table while Mr. Wing was talking to you. I don't believe you heard a thing he said."

"Such astuteness," she answered, smiling at him, "astounds me."

He laughed nervously.

"You're different than you've ever been since I've known you," he went on, undismayed. "I hope you won't think I'm making love to you. Not that I shouldn't like to, but I've got sense enough to see it's no use."

Her reply was unexpected.

"What makes you think that?" she asked curiously.

"Oh, I'm not a fool," said Mr. Cuthbert. "But if I were a poet, or that fellow Deming, I might be able to tell you what your eyes were like to-night."

"I'm glad you're not," said Honora.

As they were going in, she turned for a lingering look at the sea. A strong young moon rode serenely in the sky and struck a path of light across the restless waters. Along this shimmering way the eyes of her companion followed hers.

"I can tell you what that colour is, at least. Do you remember the blue, transparent substance that used to be on favours at children's parties?" he asked. "There were caps inside of them, and crackers."

"I believe you are a poet, after all," she said.

A shadow fell across the flags. Honora did not move.

"Hello, Chiltern," said Cuthbert. "I thought you were playing bridge. . . ."

"You haven't looked at me once to-night," he said, when Cuthbert had gone in.

She was silent.

"Are you angry?"

"Yes, a little," she answered. "Do you blame me?"

The vibration of his voice in the moonlit court awoke an answering chord in her; and a note of supplication from him touched her strangely. Logic in his presence was a little difficult — there can be no doubt of that.

"I must go in," she said unsteadily, "my carriage is waiting."

But he stood in front of her.

"I should have thought you would have gone," she said.

"I wanted to see you again."

"And now?"

"I can't leave while you feel this way," he pleaded. "I can't abandon what I have of you — what you will let me take. If I told you I would be reasonable — "

"I don't believe in miracles," she said, recovering a little; "at least in modern ones. The question is, could you become reasonable?"

"As a last resort," he replied, with a flash of humour and a touch of hope. "If you would — commute my sentence."

She passed him, and picking up her skirts, paused in the window.

"I will give you one more chance," she said.

This was the conversation that, by repeating itself, filled the interval of her drive home. So oblivious was she to Howard's presence, that he called her twice from her corner of the carriage after the vehicle had stopped; and he halted her by seizing her arm as she was about to go up the stairs. She followed him mechanically into the drawing-room.

He closed the door behind them, and the other door into the darkened dining room. He even took a precautionary glance out of the window of the porch. And these movements, which ordinarily might have aroused her curiosity, if not her alarm, she watched with a profound indifference. He took a stand before the Japanese screen in front of the fireplace, thrust his hands in his pockets, cleared his throat, and surveyed her from her white shoulders to the gold-embroidered tips of her slippers.

"I'm leaving for the West in the morning, Honora. If you've made any arrangements for me on Sunday, you'll have to cancel them. I may be gone two weeks, I may be gone a month. I don't know."

"Yes," she said.

"I'm going to tell you something those fellows in the smoking room to-night did their best to screw out of me. If you say anything about it, all's up between me and Wing. The fact that he picked me out to engineer the thing, and that he's going to let me in if I push it through, is a pretty good sign that he thinks something of my business ability, eh?"

"You'd better not tell me, Howard," she said.

"You're too clever to let it out," he assured her; and added with a chuckle: "If it goes through, order what you like. Rent a house on Bellevue Avenue — anything in reason."

"What is it?" she asked, with a sudden premonition that the thing had a vital significance for her.

"It's the greatest scheme extant," he answered with elation. "I won't go into details — you wouldn't understand 'em. Mr. Wing and some others have tried the thing before, nearer home, and it worked like a charm. Street railways. We buy up the little lines for nothing, and get an interest in the big ones, and sell the little lines for fifty times what they cost us, and guarantee big dividends for the big lines."

"It sounds to me," said Honora, slowly, "as though some one would get cheated."

"Some one get cheated!" he exclaimed, laughing. "Every one gets cheated, as you call it, if they haven't enough sense to know what their property's worth, and how to use it to the best advantage. It's a case," he announced, "of the survival of the fittest. Which reminds me that if I'm going to be fit to-morrow I'd better go to bed. Mr. Wing's to take me to New York on his yacht, and you've got to have your wits about you when you talk to the old man."

CHAPTER VI

CLIO, OR THALIA ?

According to the ordinary and inaccurate method of measuring time, a fortnight may have gone by since the event last narrated, and Honora had tasted at last the joys of authorship. Her name was not to appear, to be sure, on the cover of the Life and Letters of General Angus Chiltern; nor indeed, so far, had she written so much as a chapter or a page of a work intended to inspire young and old with the virtues of citizenship. At present the biography was in the crucial constructive stage. Should the letters be put in one volume, and the life in another? or should the letters be inserted in the text of the life? or could not there be a third and judicious mixture of both of these methods? Honora's counsel on this and other problems was, it seems, invaluable. Her own table was fairly littered with biographies more or less famous which had been fetched from the library, and the method of each considered.

Even as Mr. Garrick would never have been taken for an actor in his coach and four, so our heroine did not in the least resemble George Eliot, for instance, as she sat before her mirror at high noon with Monsieur Cadron and her maid Mathilde in worshipful attendance. Some of the ladies, indeed, who have left us those chatty memoirs of the days before the guillotine, she might have been likened to. Monsieur Cadron was an artist, and his branch of art was hair-dressing. It was by his own wish he was here to-day, since he had conceived a new coiffure especially adapted, he declared, to the type of Madame Spence. Behold him declaring ecstatically that seldom in his experience had he had such *hairs* to work with.

"Avec une telle chevelure, l'on peut tout faire, madame. Être simple, c'est le comble de l'art. Ça vous donne," he added, with clasped hands and a step backward, "ça vous donne tout à fait l'air d'une dame de Nattier."

Madame took the hand-glass, and did not deny that she was éblouissante. If madame, suggested Monsieur Cadron, had but a little dress à la Marie Antoinette? Madame had, cried madame's maid, running to fetch one with little pink flowers and green leaves on an ecru ground. Could any coiffure or any gown be more appropriate for an entertainment at which Clio was to preside?

It is obviously impossible that a masterpiece should be executed under the rules laid down by convention. It would never be finished. Mr. Chiltern was coming to lunch, and it was not the first time. On her appearance in the doorway he halted abruptly in his pacing of the drawing-room, and stared at her.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting," she said.

"It was worth it," he said. And they entered the dining room. A subdued, golden-green light came in through the tall glass doors that opened out on the little garden which had been Mrs. Forsythe's pride. The scent of roses was in the air, and a mass of them filled a silver bowl in the middle of the table. On the dark walls were Mrs. Forsythe's precious prints, and above the mantel a portrait of a thin, aristocratic gentleman who resembled the poet Tennyson. In the noonday shadows of a recess was a dark mahogany sideboard loaded with softly gleaming silver — Honora's. Chiltern sat down facing her. He looked at Honora over the roses, — and she looked at him. A sense of unreality that was, paradoxically, stronger than reality itself came over her, a sense of fitness, of harmony. And for the moment an imagination, ever straining at its leash, was allowed to soar. It was Chiltern who broke the silence.

"What a wonderful bowl!" he said.

"It has been in my father's family a great many years.

He was very fond of it," she answered, and with a sudden, impulsive movement she reached over and set the bowl aside.

"That's better," he declared, "much as I admire the bowl, and the roses."

She coloured faintly, and smiled. The feast of reason that we are impatiently awaiting is deferred. It were best to attempt to record the intangible things; the golden-green light, the perfumes, and the faint musical laughter which we can hear if we listen. Thalia's laughter, surely, not Clio's. Thalia, enamoured with such a theme, has taken the stage herself — and as Vesta, goddess of hearths. It was Vesta whom they felt to be presiding. They lingered, therefore, over the coffee, and Chiltern lighted a cigar. He did not smoke cigarettes.

"I've lived long enough," he said, "to know that I have never lived at all. There is only one thing in life worth having."

"What is it?" asked Honora.

"This," he answered, with a gesture; "when it is permanent."

She smiled.

"And how is one to know whether it would be — permanent?"

"Through experience and failure," he answered quickly, "we learn to distinguish the reality when it comes. It is unmistakable."

"Suppose it comes too late?" she said, forgetting the ancient verse inscribed in her youthful diary: "Those who walk on ice will slide against their wills."

"To admit that is to be a coward," he declared.

"Such a philosophy may be fitting for a man," she replied, "but for a woman — "

"We are no longer in the dark ages," he interrupted. "Every one, man or woman, has the right to happiness. There is no reason why we should suffer all our lives for a mistake."

"A mistake!" she echoed.

"Certainly," he said. "It is all a matter of luck, or fate, or whatever you choose to call it. Do you suppose, if I could have found fifteen years ago the woman to have made me happy, I should have spent so much time in seeking distraction?"

"Perhaps you could not have been capable of appreciating her — fifteen years ago," suggested Honora. And, lest he might misconstrue her remark, she avoided his eyes.

"Perhaps," he admitted. "But suppose I have found her now, when I know the value of things."

"Suppose you should find her now — within a reasonable time. What would you do?"

"Marry her," he exclaimed promptly. "Marry her and take her to Grenoble, and live the life my father lived before me."

She did not reply, but rose, and he followed her to the shaded corner of the porch where they usually sat. The bundle of yellow-stained envelopes he had brought were lying on the table, and Honora picked them up mechanically.

"I have been thinking," she said as she removed the elastics, "that it is a mistake to begin a biography by the enumeration of one's ancestors. Readers become frightfully bored before they get through the first chapter."

"I'm beginning to believe," he laughed, "that you will have to write this one alone. All the ideas I have got so far have been yours. Why shouldn't you write it, and I arrange the material, and talk about it! That appears to be all I'm good for."

If she allowed her mind to dwell on the vista he thus presented, she did not betray herself.

"Another thing," she said, "it should be written like fiction."

"Like fiction?"

"Fact should be written like fiction, and fiction like fact. It's difficult to express what I mean. But this life of your father deserves to be widely known, and it should be entertainingly done, like Lockhart, or Parton's works —"

An envelope fell to the floor, spilling its contents. Among them were several photographs.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "how beautiful! What place is this?"

"I hadn't gone over these letters," he answered. "I only got them yesterday from Cecil Grainger. These are some pictures of Grenoble which must have been taken shortly before my father died."

She gazed in silence at the old house half hidden by great maples and beeches, their weighted branches sweeping the ground. The building was of wood, painted white, and through an archway of verdure one saw the generous doorway with its circular steps, with its fan-light above, and its windows at the side. Other quaint windows, some of them of triple width, suggested an interior of mystery and interest.

"My great-great-grandfather, Alexander Chiltern, built it," he said, "on land granted to him before the Revolution. Of course the house has been added to since then, but the simplicity of the original has always been kept. My father put on the conservatory, for instance," and Chiltern pointed to a portion at the end of one of the long low wings. "He got the idea from the orangery of a Georgian house in England, and an English architect designed it."

Honora took up the other photographs. One of them, over which she lingered, was of a charming, old-fashioned garden spattered with sunlight, and shut out from the world by a high brick wall. Behind the wall, again, were the dense masses of the trees, and at the end of a path between nodding foxgloves and Canterbury bells, in a curved recess, a stone seat.

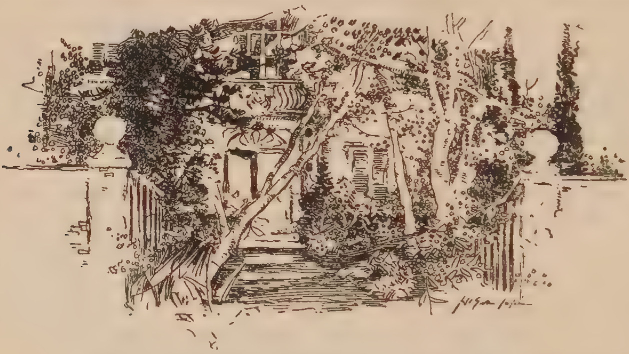
She turned her face. His was at her shoulder.

"How could you ever have left it?" she asked reproachfully.

She voiced his own regrets, which the crowding memories had awakened.

"I don't know," he answered, not without emotion. "I have often asked myself that question." He crossed over to the railing of the porch, swung about, and looked at her. Her eyes were still on the picture. "I can imagine you in that garden," he said.

Did the garden cast the spell by which she saw herself on the seat? or was it Chiltern's voice? She would indeed love and cherish it. And was it true that she belonged there, securely infolded within those peaceful walls? How marvellously well was Thalia playing her comedy! Which was the real, and which the false? What of true value, what of peace and security was contained in her present existence? She had missed the meaning of things, and suddenly it was held up before her, in a garden.



A later hour found them in Honora's runabout wandering northward along quiet country roads on the eastern side of the island. Chiltern, who was driving, seemed to take no thought of their direction, until at last, with an exclamation, he stopped the horse; and Honora beheld an abandoned mansion of a bygone age sheltered by ancient trees, with wide lands beside it sloping to the water.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Beaulieu," he replied. "It was built in the seventeenth century, I believe, and must have been a fascinating place in colonial days." He drove in between the fences and tied the horse, and came around by the side of the runabout. "Won't you get out and look at it?"

She hesitated, and their eyes met as he held out his hand, but she avoided it and leaped quickly to the ground: neither spoke as they walked around the deserted house and gazed at the quaint façade, broken by a crumbling, shaded balcony let in above the entrance door. No sound broke the stillness of the summer's day — a pregnant stillness. The air was heavy with perfumes, and the leaves formed a tracery against the marvellous blue of the sky. Mystery brooded in the place. Here, in this remote paradise now in ruins, people had dwelt and loved. Thought ended there; and feeling, which is unformed thought, began. Again she glanced at him, and again their eyes met, and hers faltered. They turned, as with one consent, down the path toward the distant water. Paradise overgrown! Could it be reconstructed, redeemed?

In former days the ground they trod had been a pleasance the width of the house, bordered, doubtless, by the forest. Trees grew out of the flower beds now, and underbrush choked the paths. The box itself, that once primly lined the alleys, was gnarled and shapeless. Labyrinth had replaced order, nature had reaped her vengeance. At length, in the deepening shade, they came, at what had been the edge of the old terrace, to the daintiest of summer-houses, crumbling too, the shutters off their hinges, the floor-boards loose. Past and gone were the idyls of which it had been the stage.

They turned to the left, through tangled box that wound hither and thither, until they stopped at a stone wall bordering a tree-arched lane. At the bottom of the lane was a glimpse of blue water.

Honora sat down on the wall with her back to a great trunk. Chiltern, with a hand on the stones, leaped over lightly, and stood for some moments in the lane, his feet a little apart and firmly planted, his hands behind his back.

What had Thalia been about to allow the message of that morning to creep into her comedy? a message announcing the coming of an intruder not in the play, in the person of a husband bearing gifts. What right had he, in the eternal essence of things, to return? He was out of all time and place. Such had been her feeling when she had first read the hastily written letter, but even when she had burned it it had risen again from the ashes. Anything but that! In trying not to think of it, she had picked up the newspaper, learned of a railroad accident, — and shuddered. Anything but his return! Her marriage was a sin, — there could be no sacrament in it. She would flee first, and abandon all rather than submit to it.

Chiltern's step aroused her now. He came back to the wall where she was sitting, and faced her.

"You are sad," he said.

She shook her head at him, slowly, and tried to smile.

"What has happened?" he demanded rudely. "I can't bear to see you sad."

"I am going away," she said. The decision had suddenly come to her. Why had she not seen before that it was inevitable?

He seized her wrist as it lay on the wall, and she winced from the sudden pain of his grip.

"Honora, I love you," he said, "I must have you — I will have you. I will make you happy. I promise it on my soul. I can't, I won't live without you."

She did not listen to his words — she could not have repeated them afterwards. The very tone of his voice was changed by passion; creation spoke through him, and she heard and thrilled and swayed and soared, forgetting heaven and earth and hell as he seized her in his arms and covered her face with kisses. Thus Eric the Red might have wooed. And by what grace she spoke the word that delivered her she never knew. As suddenly as he had seized her he released her, and she stood before him with flaming cheeks and painful breath.

"I love you," he said, "I love you. I have searched the world for you and found you, and by all the laws of God you are mine."

And love was written in her eyes. He had but to read it there, though her lips might deny it. This was the man of all men she would have chosen, and she was his by right of conquest. Yet she held up her hand with a gesture of entreaty.

"No, Hugh — it cannot be," she said.

"Cannot!" he cried. "I will take you. You love me."

"I am married."

"Married! Do you mean that you would let that man stand between you and happiness?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, in a frightened voice.

"Just what I say," he cried, with incredible vehemence. "Leave him — divorce him. You cannot live with him. He isn't worthy to touch your hand."

The idea planted itself with the force of a barbed arrow from a strong-bow. Struggle as she might, she could not henceforth extract it.

"Oh!" she cried.

He took her arm, gently, and forced her to sit down on the wall. Such was the completeness of his mastery that she did not resist. He sat down beside her.

"Listen, Honora," he said, and tried to speak calmly, though his vcice was still vibrant; "let us look the situation in the face. As I told you once, the days of useless martyrdom are past. The world is more enlightened today, and recognizes an individual right to happiness."

"To happiness," she repeated after him, like a child. He forgot his words as he looked into her eyes: they were lighted as with all the candles of heaven in his honour.

"Listen," he said hoarsely, and his fingers tightened on her arm.

The current running through her from him made her his instrument. Did he say the sky was black, she would have exclaimed at the discovery.

"Yes — I am listening."

"Honora!"

"Hugh," she answered, and blinded him. He was possessed by the tragic fear that she was acting a dream; presently she would awake — and shatter the universe. His dominance was too complete.

"I love you—I respect you. You are making it very hard for me. Please try to understand what I am saying," he cried almost fiercely. "This thing, this miracle, has happened in spite of us. Henceforth you belong to me—do you hear?"

Once more the candles flared up.

"We cannot drift. We must decide now upon some definite action. Our lives are our own, to make as we choose. You said you were going away. And you meant—alone?"

The eyes were wide, now, with fright.

"Oh, I must—I must," she said. "Don't—don't talk about it." And she put forth a hand over his.

"I will talk about it," he declared, trembling. "I have thought it all out," and this time it was her fingers that tightened. "You are going away. And presently—when you are free—I will come to you."

For a moment the current stopped.

"No, no!" she cried, almost in terror. The first fatalist must have been a woman, and the vision of rent prison bars drove her mad. "No, we could never be happy"

"We can—we will be happy," he said, with a conviction that was unshaken. "Do you hear me? I will not debase what I have to say by resorting to comparisons. But—others I know have been happy—are happy, though their happiness cannot be spoken of with ours. Listen. You will go away—for a little while—and afterwards we shall be together for all time. Nothing shall separate us. We never have known life, either of us, until now. I, missing you, have run after the false gods. And you—I say it with truth—needed me. We will go to live at Grenoble, as my father and mother lived. We will take up their duties there. And if it seems possible, I will go into public life. When I return, I shall find you waiting for me—in the garden."

So real had the mirage become, that Honora did not answer. The desert and its journey fell away. Could such a thing, after all, be possible? Did fate deal twice to those whom she had made novices? The mirage, indeed, suddenly became reality — a mirage only because she had proclaimed it such. She had beheld in it, as he spoke, a Grenoble which was paradise regained. And why should paradise regained be a paradox? Why paradise regained? Paradise gained. She had never known it, until he had flung wide the gates. She had sought for it, and never found it until now, and her senses doubted it. It was a paradise of love, to be sure; but one, too, of duty. Duty made it real. Work was there, and fulfilment of the purpose of life itself. And if his days hitherto had been useless, hers had in truth been barren.

It was only of late, after a life-long groping, that she had discovered their barrenness. The right to happiness! Could she begin anew, and found it upon a rock? And was he the rock?

The question startled her, and she drew away from him first her hand, and then she turned her body, staring at him with widened eyes. He did not resist the movement; nor could he, being male, divine what was passing within her, though he watched her anxiously. She had no thought of the first days, — but afterwards. For at such times it is the woman who scans the veil of the future. How long would that beacon burn which flamed now in such prodigal waste? Would not the very springs of it dry up? She looked at him, and she saw the Viking. But the Viking had fled from the world, and they — they would be going into it. Could love prevail against its dangers and pitfalls and — duties? *Love* was the word that rang out, as one calling through the garden, and her thoughts ran molten. Let love overflow — she gloried in the waste! And let the lean years come, — she defied them to-day.

"Oh, Hugh!" she faltered.

"My dearest!" he cried, and would have seized her in his arms again but for a look of supplication. That he had in him this innate and unsuspected chivalry filled her with an exquisite sweetness.

"You will — protect me?" she asked.

"With my life and with my honour," he answered. "Honora, there will be no happiness like ours."

"I wish I knew," she sighed: and then, her look returning from the veil, rested on him with a tenderness that was inexpressible. "I — I don't care, Hugh. I trust you."

The sun was setting. Slowly they went back together through the paths of the tangled garden, which had doubtless seen many dramas, and the courses changed of many lives: overgrown and outworn now, yet love was loth to leave it. Honora paused on the lawn before the house, and looked back at him over her shoulder.

"How happy we could have been here, in those days," she sighed.

"We will be happier there," he said.

Honora loved. Many times in her life had she believed herself to have had this sensation, and yet had known nothing of these aches and ecstasies! Her mortal body, unattended, went out to dinner that evening. Never, it is said, was her success more pronounced. The charm of Randolph Leffingwell, which had fascinated the nobility of three kingdoms, had descended on her, and hostesses had discovered that she possessed the magic touch necessary to make a dinner complete. Her quality, as we know, was not wit: it was something as old as the world, as new as modern psychology. It was, in short, the power to stimulate. She infused a sense of well-being; and ordinary people, in her presence, surprised themselves by saying clever things.

Lord Ayllington, a lean, hard-riding gentleman, who was supposed to be on the verge of contracting an alliance with the eldest of the Grenfell girls, regretted that Mrs. Spence was neither unmarried nor an heiress.

"You know," he said to Cecil Grainger, who happened to be gracing his wife's dinner-party, "she's the sort of woman for whom a man might consent to live in Venice."

"And she's the sort of woman," replied Mr. Grainger, "a man couldn't get to go to Venice."

Lord Aylllington's sigh was a proof of an intimate knowledge of the world.

"I suppose not," he said. "It's always so. And there are few American women who would throw everything overboard for a grand passion."

"You ought to see her on the beach," Mr. Grainger suggested.

"I intend to," said Ayllington. "By the way, not a few of your American women get divorced, and keep their cake and eat it, too. It's a bit difficult, here at Newport, for a stranger, you know."

"I'm willing to bet," declared Mr. Grainger, "that it doesn't pay. When you're divorced and married again you've got to keep up appearances — the first time you don't. Some of these people are working pretty hard."

Whereupon, for the Englishman's enlightenment, he recounted a little gossip.

This, of course, was in the smoking room. In the drawing-room, Mrs. Grainger's cousin did not escape, and the biography was the subject of laughter.

"You see something of him, I hear," remarked Mrs. Playfair, a lady the deficiency of whose neck was supplied by jewels, and whose conversation sounded like liquid coming out of an inverted bottle. "Is he really serious about the biography?"

"You'll have to ask Mr. Grainger," replied Honora.

"Hugh ought to marry," Mrs. Grenfell observed.

"Why did he come back?" inquired another who had just returned from a prolonged residence abroad. "Was there a woman in the case?"

"Put it in the plural, and you'll be nearer right," laughed Mrs. Grenfell, and added to Honora, "You'd best take care, my dear, he's dangerous."

Honora seemed to be looking down on them from a great height, and to Reginald Farwell alone is due the discovery of this altitude; his reputation for astuteness, after that evening, was secure. He had sat next her, and had merely put two and two together — an operation that is probably at the root of most prophecies. More than once that summer Mr. Farwell had taken sketches down Honora's lane, for she was on what was known as his list of advisers: a sheepfold of ewes, some one had called it, and he was always piqued when one of them went astray. In addition to this, intuition told him that he had taken the name of a deity in vain — and that deity was Chiltern. These reflections resulted in another after-dinner conversation to which we are not supposed to listen.

He found Jerry Shorter in a receptive mood, and drew him into Cecil Grainger's study, where this latter gentleman, when awake, carried on his lifework of keeping a record of prize winners.

"I believe there is something between Mrs. Spence and Hugh Chiltern, after all, Jerry," he said.

"By jinks, you don't say so!" exclaimed Mr. Shorter, who had a profound respect for his friend's diagnoses in these matters. "She was dazzling to-night, and her eyes were like stars. I passed her in the hall just now, and I might as well have been in Halifax."

"She fairly withered me when I made a little fun of Chiltern," declared Farwell.

"I tell you what it is, Reggie," remarked Mr. Shorter, with more frankness than tact, "you could talk architecture with 'em from now to Christmas, and nothing'd happen, but it would take an iceberg to write a book with Hugh and see him alone six days out of seven. Chiltern knocks women into a cocked hat. I've seen 'em stark raving crazy. Why, there was that Mrs. Slicer six or seven years ago — you remember — that Cecil Grainger had such a deuce of a time with. And there was Mrs. Dutton — I was a committee to see her, when the old General was alive, — to say nothing about a good many women you and I know."

Mr. Farwell nodded.

"I'm confoundedly sorry if it's so," Mr. Shorter continued, with sincerity. "She has a brilliant future ahead of her. She's got good blood in her, she's stunning to look at, and she's made her own way in spite of that Billycock of a husband who talks like the original Rothschild. By the bye, Wing is using him for a good thing. He's sent him out West to pull that street railway chestnut out of the fire. I'm not particularly squeamish, Reggie, though I try to play the game straight myself — the way my father played it. But by the lord Harry, I can't see the difference between Dick Turpin and Wing and Trixy Brent. It's hold and deliver with those fellows. But if the police get anybody, they get Spence."

"The police never get anybody," said Farwell, pessimistically; for the change of topic bored him.

"No, I suppose they don't," answered Mr. Shorter, cheerfully finishing his chartreuse, and fixing his eye on one of the coloured lithographs of lean horses on Cecil Grainger's wall. "I'd talk to Hugh, if I wasn't as much afraid of him as of Jim Jeffries. I don't want to see him ruin her career."

"Why should an affair with him ruin it?" asked Farwell, unexpectedly. "There was Constance Witherspoon. I understand that went pretty far."

"My dear boy," said Mr. Shorter, "it's the women. Bessie Grainger here, for instance — she'd go right up in the air. And the women had — well, a childhood interest in Constance. Self-preservation is the first law — of women."

"They say Hugh has changed — that he wants to settle down," said Farwell.

"If you'd ever gone to church, Reggie," said Mr. Shorter, "you'd know something about the limitations of the leopard."

CHAPTER VII

"LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS"

THAT night was Honora's soul played upon by the unknown musician of the sleepless hours. Now a mad, ecstatic chorus dinned in her ears and set her blood coursing; and again despair seized her with a dirge. Periods of semiconsciousness only came to her, and from one of these she was suddenly startled into wakefulness by her own words. "I have the right to make of my life what I can." But when she beheld the road of terrors that stretched between her and the shining places, it seemed as though she would never have the courage to fare forth along its way. To look back was to survey a prospect even more dreadful.

The incidents of her life ranged by in procession. Not in natural sequence, but a group here and a group there. And it was given her, for the first time, to see many things clearly. But now she loved. God alone knew what she felt for this man, and when she thought of him the very perils of her path were dwarfed. On returning home that night she had given her maid her cloak, and had stood for a long time immobile, gazing at her image in the pier-glass.

"Madame est belle comme l'Impératrice d'Autriche!" said the maid at length.

"Am I really beautiful, Mathilde?"

Mathilde raised her eyes and hands to heaven in a gesture that admitted no doubt. Mathilde, moreover, could read a certain kind of history if the print were large enough.

Honora looked in the glass again. Yes, she was beautiful. He had found her so, he had told her so. And here was the testimony of her own eyes. The bloom on the nectarines that came every morning from Mr. Chamberlin's greenhouse could not compare with the colour of her cheeks; her hair was like the dusk; her eyes like the blue pools among the rocks, and touched now by the sun; her neck and arms of the whiteness of sea-foam. It was meet that she should be thus for him and for the love he brought her.

She turned suddenly to the maid.

"Do you love me, Mathilde?" she asked.

Mathilde was not surprised. She was, on the contrary, profoundly touched.

"How can madame ask?" she cried impulsively, and seized Honora's hand. How was it possible to be near madame, and not love her?

"And would you go — anywhere with me?"

The scene came back to her in the night watches. For the little maid had wept and vowed eternal fidelity.

It was not until the first faint herald of the morning that Honora could bring herself to pronounce the fateful thing that stood between her and happiness, that threatened to mar the perfection of a heaven-born love — Divorce! And thus, having named it resolutely several times, the demon of salvation began gradually to assume a kindly aspect that at times became almost benign. In fact, this one was not a demon at all, but a liberator: the demon, she perceived, stalked behind him, and his name was Notoriety. It was he who would flay her for coquetting with the liberator.

What if she were flayed? Once married to Chiltern, once embarked upon that life of usefulness, once firmly established on ground of her own tilling, and she was immune. And this led her to a consideration of those she knew who had been flayed. They were not few, and a surfeit of publicity is a sufficient reason for not enumerating them here. And during this process of exorcism Notoriety became a bogey, too: he had been powerless to hurt them. It must be true what Chiltern had said — that the world was changing. The tragic and the ridiculous here joining hands, she remembered that Reggie

Farwell had told her that he had recently made a trip to western New York to inspect a house he had built for a "remarried" couple who were not wholly unknown. The dove-cote, he had called it. The man, in his former marriage, had been renowned all up and down tidewater as a rake and a brute, and now it was an exception when he did not have at least one baby on his knee. And he knew, according to Mr. Farwell, more about infant diet than the whole staff of a maternity hospital.

At length, as she stared into the darkness, dissolution came upon it. The sills of her windows outlined themselves, and a blurred foliage was sketched into the frame. With a problem but half solved the day had surprised her. She marvelled to see that it grew apace, and presently arose to look out upon a stillness like that of eternity: in the grey light the very leaves seemed to be holding their breath in expectancy of the thing that was to come. Presently the drooping roses raised their heads, from pearl to silver grew the light, and comparison ended. The reds were aflame, the greens resplendent, the lawn sewn with the diamonds of the dew.

A little travelling table was beside the window, and Honora took her pen and wrote.

"My dearest, above all created things I love you. Morning has come, and it seems to me that I have travelled far since last I saw you. I have come to a new place, which is neither hell nor heaven, and in the mystery of it you — you alone are real. It is to your strength that I cling, and I know that you will not fail me.

"Since I saw you, Hugh, I have been through the Valley of the Shadow. I have thought of many things. One truth alone is clear — that I love you transcendently. You have touched and awakened me into life. I walk in a world unknown.

"There is the glory of martyrdom in this message I send you now. *You must not come to me again until I send for you.* I cannot, I will not trust myself or you. I will keep this love which has come to me undefiled. It has brought with it to me a new spirit, a spirit with a scorn for things base and mean. Though it were my last chance in life, I would not see you if you came. If I thought you would not understand what I feel, I could not love you as I do.

"I will write to you again, when I see my way more clearly. I told you in the garden before you spoke that I was going away. Do not seek to know my plans. For the sake of the years to come, obey me.

"HONORA."

She reread the letter, and sealed it. A new and different exaltation had come to her — begotten, perhaps, in the act of writing. A new courage filled her, and now she contemplated the ordeal with a tranquillity that surprised her. The disorder and chaos of the night were passed, and she welcomed the coming day, and those that were to follow it. As though the fates were inclined to humour her impatience, there was a telegram on her breakfast tray, dated at New York, and informing her that her husband would be in Newport about the middle of the afternoon. His western trip was finished a day earlier than he expected. Honora rang her bell.

"Mathilde, I am going away."

"Oui, madame."

"And I should like you to go with me."

"Oui, madame."

"It is only fair that you should understand, Mathilde. I am going away alone. I am not — coming back."

The maid's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Oh, madame," she cried, in a burst of loyalty, "if madame will permit me to stay with her!"

Honora was troubled, but her strange calmness did not forsake her. The morning was spent in packing, — which was a simple matter. She took only such things as she needed, and left her dinner-gowns hanging in the closets. A few precious books of her own she chose, but the jewellery her husband had given her was put in boxes and laid upon the dressing-table. In one of these boxes was her wedding ring. When luncheon was over, an astonished and perturbed butler packed the Leffingwell silver and sent it off to storage.

There had been but one interruption in Honora's labours. A note had arrived — from him — a note and a box. He would obey her! She had known he would understand, and respect her the more. What would their love have been, without that respect? She shuddered to think. And he sent her this ring, as a token of that love, as undying as the fire in its stones. Would she wear it, that in her absence she might think of him? Honora kissed it and slipped it on her finger, where it sparkled. The letter was beneath her gown, though she knew it by heart. Chiltern had gone at last: he could not, he said, remain in Newport and not see her.

At midday she made but the pretence of a meal. It was not until afterwards, in wandering through the lower rooms of this house, become so dear to her, that agitation seized her, and a desire to weep. What was she leaving so precipitately? and whither going? The world indeed was wide, and these rooms had been her home. The day had grown blue-grey, and in the dining room the gentle face seemed to look down upon her compassionately from the portrait. The scent of the roses overpowered her. As she listened, no sound broke the quiet of the place.

Would Howard never come? The train was in — had been in ten minutes. Hark, the sound of wheels! Her heart beating wildly, she ran to the windows of the drawing-room and peered through the lilacs. Yes, there he was, ascending the steps.

"Mrs. Spence is out, I suppose," she heard him say to the butler, who followed with his bag.

"No, sir, she's in the drawing-room."

The sight of him, with his air of satisfaction and importance, proved an unexpected tonic to her strength. It was as though he had brought into the room, marshalled behind him, all the horrors of her marriage, and she marvelled and shuddered anew at the thought of the years of that sufferance.

"Well, I'm back," he said, "and we've made a great killing, as I wrote you. They were easier than I expected."

He came forward for the usual perfunctory kiss, but she recoiled, and it was then that his eye seemed to grasp the significance of her travelling suit and veil, and he glanced at her face.

"What's up? Where are you going?" he demanded. "Has anything happened?"

"Everything," she said, and it was then, suddenly, that she felt the store of her resolution begin to ebb, and she trembled. "Howard, I am going away."

He stopped short, and thrust his hands into the pockets of his checked trousers.

"Going away," he repeated. "Where?"

"I don't know," said Honora; "I'm going away."

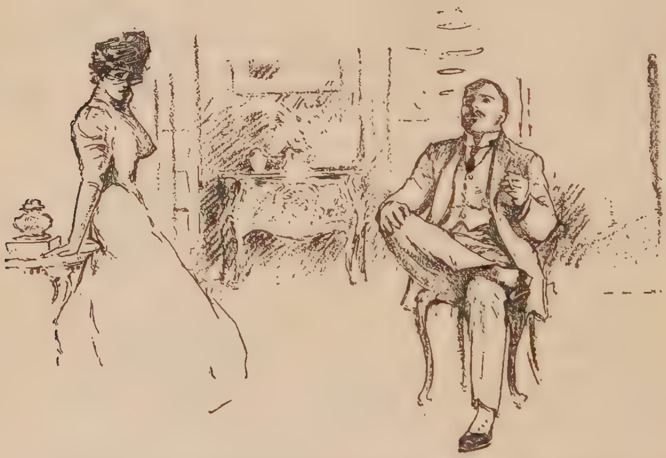
As though to cap the climax of tragedy, he smiled as he produced his cigarette case. And she was swept, as it were, by a scarlet flame that deprived her for the moment of speech.

"Well," he said complacently, "there's no accounting for women. A case of nerves — eh, Honora? Been hitting the pace a little too hard, I guess." He lighted a match, blissfully unaware of the quality of her look. "All of us have to get toned up once in a while. I need it myself. I've had to drink a case of Scotch whiskey out West to get this deal through. Now what's the name of that new boat with everything on her from a café to a Stock Exchange? A German name."

"I don't know," said Honora. She had answered automatically.

To the imminent peril of one of the frailest of Mrs. Forsythe's chairs, he sat down on it, placed his hands on his knees, flung back his head, and blew the smoke towards the ceiling. Still she stared at him, as in a state of semi-hypnosis.

"Instead of going off to one of those thousand-dollar-a-minute doctors, let me prescribe for you," he said. "I've handled some nervous men in my time, and I guess nervous women aren't much different. You've had these little attacks before, and they blow over — don't they? Wing owes me a vacation. If I do say it myself, there are not five men in New York who would have pulled off this deal for him. Now the proposition I was going to make to you is this: that we get cosey in a cabin de luxe on that German boat, hire an automobile on the other side, and do up Europe. It's a sort of a handicap never to have been over there."



"Oh, you're making it very hard for me, Howard," she cried. "I might have known that you couldn't understand, that you never could understand — why I am going away. I've lived with you all this time, and you do not know me any better than you know — the scrub-woman. I'm going away from you — forever."

In spite of herself, she ended with an uncontrollable sob.

"Forever!" he repeated, but he continued to smoke and to look at her without any evidences of emotion, very much as though he had received an ultimatum in a business transaction. And then there crept into his expression something of a complacent pity that braced her to continue.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because — because I don't love you. Because you don't love me. You don't know what love is — you never will."

"But we're married," he said. "We get along all right."

"Oh, can't you see that that makes it all the worse!" she cried. "I can stand it no longer. I can't live with you — I won't live with you. I'm of no use to you — you're sufficient unto yourself. It was all a frightful mistake. I brought nothing into your life, and I take nothing out of it. We are strangers — we have always been so. I am not even your housekeeper. Your whole interest in life is in your business, and you come home to read the newspapers and to sleep! Home! The very word is a mockery. If you had to choose between me and your business you wouldn't hesitate an instant. And I — I have been starved. It isn't your fault, perhaps, that you don't understand that a woman needs something more than dinner-gowns and jewels and — and trips abroad. Her only possible compensation for living with a man is love. Love — and you haven't the faintest conception of it. It isn't your fault, perhaps. It's my fault for marrying you. I didn't know any better."

She paused with her breast heaving. He rose and walked over to the fireplace and flicked his ashes into it before he spoke. His calmness maddened her.

"Why didn't you say something about this before?" he asked.

"Because I didn't know it — I didn't realize it — until now."

"When you married me," he went on, "you had an idea that you were going to live in a house on Fifth Avenue with a ballroom, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Honora. "I do not say I am not to blame. I was a fool. My standards were false. In spite of the fact that my aunt and uncle are the most unworldly people that ever lived — perhaps because of it — I knew nothing of the values of life. I have but one thing to say in my defence. I thought I loved you, and that you could give me — what every woman needs."

"You were never satisfied from the first," he retorted. "You wanted money and position — a mania with American women. I've made a success that few men of my age can duplicate. And even now you are not satisfied when I come back to tell you that I have money enough to snap my fingers at half these people you know."

"How," asked Honora, "how did you make it?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

She turned away from him with a gesture of weariness.

"No, you wouldn't understand that, either, Howard."

It was not until then that he showed feeling.

"Somebody has been talking to you about this deal. I'm not surprised. A lot of these people are angry because we didn't let them in. What have they been saying?" he demanded.

Her eyes flashed.

"Nobody has spoken to me on the subject," she said. "I only know what I have read, and what you have told me. In the first place, you deceived the stockholders of these railways into believing their property was worthless, and in the second place, you intend to sell it to the public for much more than it is worth."

At first he stared at her in surprise. Then he laughed.

"By George, you'd make something of a financier yourself, Honora," he exclaimed. And seeing that she did not answer, continued: "Well, you've got it about right, only it's easier said than done. It takes brains. That's what business is — a survival of the fittest. If you don't do the other man, he'll do you." He opened the cigarette case once more. "And now," he said, "let me give you a little piece of advice. It's a good motto for a woman not to meddle with what doesn't concern her. It isn't her business to make the money, but to spend it; and she can usually do that to the queen's taste."

"A high ideal!" she exclaimed.

"You ought to have some notion of where that ideal came from," he retorted. "You were all for getting rich, in order to compete with these people. Now you've got what you want — "

"And I am going to throw it away. That is like a woman, isn't it?"

He glanced at her, and then at his watch.

"See here, Honora, I ought to go over to Mr. Wing's. I wired him I'd be there at four-thirty."

"Don't let me keep you," she replied.

"By gad, you are pale!" he said. "What's got into the women these days? They never used to have these confounded nerves. Well, if you are bent on it, I suppose there's no use trying to stop you. Go off somewhere and take a rest, and when you come back you'll see things differently."

She held out her hand.

"Good-by, Howard," she said. "I wanted you to know that I didn't — bear you any ill-will — that I blame myself as much as you. More, if anything. I hope you will be happy — I know you will. But I must ask you to believe me when I say that I shan't come back. I — I am leaving all the valuable things you gave me. You will find them on my dressing-table. And I wanted to tell you that my uncle sent me a little legacy from my father — an unexpected one — that makes me independent."

He did not take her hand, but was staring at her now, incredulously.

"You mean you are actually going?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"But — what shall I say to Mr. Wing? What will he think?"

Despite the ache in her heart, she smiled.

"Does it make any difference what Mr. Wing thinks?" she asked gently. "Need he know? Isn't this a matter which concerns us alone? I shall go off, and after a certain time people will understand that I am not coming back."

"But — have you considered that it may interfere with my prospects?" he asked.

"Why should it? You are invaluable to Mr. Wing. He can't afford to dispense with your services just because you will be divorced. That would be ridiculous. Some of his own associates are divorced."

"Divorced!" he cried, and she saw that he had grown pasty white. "On what grounds? Have you been —"

He did not finish.

"No," she said, "you need fear no scandal. There will be nothing in any way harmful to your — prospects."

"What can I do?" he said, though more to himself than to her. Her quick ear detected in his voice a note of relief. And yet he struck in her, standing helplessly smoking in the middle of the floor, chords of pity.

"You can do nothing, Howard," she said. "If you lived with me from now to the millennium you couldn't make me love you, nor could you love me — the way I must be loved. Try to realize it. The wrench is what you dread. After it is over you will be much more contented, much happier, than you have been with me. Believe me."

His next remark astonished her.

"What's the use of being so damned precipitate?" he demanded.

Precipitate!

"Because I can stand it no longer. I should go mad," she answered.

He took a turn up and down the room, stopped suddenly, and stared at her with eyes that had grown smaller. Suspicion is slow to seize the complacent. Was it possible that he had been supplanted?

Honora, with an instinct of what was coming, held up her head. Had he been angry, had he been a man, how much humiliation he would have spared her!

"So you're in love!" he said. "I might have known that something was at the bottom of this."

She took account of and quivered at the many meanings behind his speech — meanings which he was too cowardly to voice in words.

"Yes," she answered, "I am in love — in love as I never hoped to be — as I did not think it possible to be. My love is such that I would go through hell fire for the sake of it. I do not expect you to believe me when I tell you that such is not the reason why I am leaving you. If you had loved me with the least spark of passion, if I thought I were in the least bit needful to you as a woman and as a soul, as a helper and a confidante, instead of a mere puppet to advertise your prosperity, this would not — could not — have happened. I love a man who would give up the world for me to-morrow. I have but one life to live, and I am going to find happiness if I can."

She paused, afire with an eloquence that had come unsought. But her husband only stared at her. She was transformed beyond his recognition. Surely he had not married this woman! And, if the truth be told, down in his secret soul whispered a small, congratulatory voice. Although he did not yet fully realize it, he was glad he had not.

Honora, with an involuntary movement, pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Good-by, Howard," she said. "I — I did not expect you to understand. If I had stayed, I should have made you miserably unhappy."

He took her hand in a dazed manner, as though he knew not in the least what he was doing. He muttered something and found speech impossible. He gulped once, uncomfortably. The English language had ceased to be a medium. Great is the force of habit! In the emergency he reached for his cigarette case.

Honora had given orders that the carriage was to wait at the door. The servants might suspect, but that was all. Her maid had been discreet. She drew down her veil as she descended the steps, and told the coachman to drive to the station.

It was raining. Leaning forward from under the hood as the horses started, she took her last look at the lilacs.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH THE LAW BETRAYS A HEART

It was still raining when she got into a carriage at Boston and drove under the elevated tracks, through the narrow, slippery business streets, to the hotel. From the windows of her room, as the night fell, she looked out across the dripping foliage of the Common. Below her, and robbed from that sacred ground, were the little granite buildings that housed the entrances to the subway, and for a long time she stood watching the people crowding into these. Most of them had homes to go to! In the gathering gloom the arc-lights shone, casting yellow streaks on the glistening pavement; wagons and carriages plunged into the maelstrom at the corner; pedestrians dodged and slipped; lightnings flashed from overhead wires, and clanging trolley cars pushed their greater bulk through the mass. And presently the higher toned and more ominous bell of an ambulance sounded on its way to the scene of an accident.

It was Mathilde who ordered her dinner and pressed her to eat. But she had no heart for food. In her bright sitting-room, with the shades tightly drawn, an inexpressible loneliness assailed her. A large engraving of a picture of a sentimental school hung on the wall: she could not bear to look at it, and yet her eyes, from time to time, were fatally drawn thither. It was of a young girl taking leave of her lover, in early Christian times, before entering the arena. It haunted Honora, and wrought upon her imagination to such a pitch that she went into her bedroom to write.

For a long time nothing more was written of the letter than "Dear Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary": what to say to them?

"I do not know what you will think of me. I do not know, to-night, what to think of myself. I have left Howard. It is not because he was cruel to me, or untrue. He does not love me, nor I him. I cannot expect you, who have known the happiness of marriage, to realize the tortures of it without love. My pain in telling you this now is all the greater because I realize your belief as to the sacredness of the tie — and it is not your fault that you did not instil that belief into me. I have had to live and to think and to suffer for myself. I do not attempt to account for my action, and I hesitate to lay the blame upon the modern conditions and atmosphere in which I lived; for I feel that, above all things, I must be honest with myself.

"My marriage with Howard was a frightful mistake, and I have grown slowly to realize it, until life with him became insupportable. Since he does not love me, since his one interest is his business, my departure makes no great difference to him.

"Dear Aunt Mary and Uncle Tom, I realize that I owe you much — everything that I am. I do not expect you to understand or to condone what I have done. I only beg that you will continue to love your niece,

"Honora."

She tried to review this letter. Incoherent though it were and incomplete, in her present state of mind she was able to add but a few words as a postscript. "I will write you my plans in a day or two, when I see my way more clearly. I would fly to you — but I cannot. I am going to get a divorce."

She sat for a time picturing the scene in the sitting-room when they should read it, and a longing which was almost irresistible seized her to go back to that shelter. One force alone held her in misery where she was, — her love for Chiltern; it drew her on to suffer the horrors of exile and publicity. When she suffered most, his image rose before her, and she kissed the ring on her hand. Where was he now, on this rainy night? On the seas?

At the thought she heard again the fog-horns and the sirens.

Her sleep was fitful. Many times she went over again her talk with Howard, and she surprised herself by wondering what he had thought and felt since her departure. And ever and anon she was startled out of chimerical dreams by the clamour of bells — the trolley cars on their ceaseless round passing below. At last came the slumber of exhaustion.

It was nine o'clock when she awoke and faced the distasteful task she had set herself for the day. In her predicament she descended to the office, where the face of one of the clerks attracted her, and she waited until he was unoccupied.

"I should like you to tell me — the name of some reputable lawyer," she said.

"Certainly, Mrs. Spence," he replied, and Honora was startled at the sound of her name. She might have realized that he would know her. "I suppose a young lawyer would do — if the matter is not very important."

"Oh, no!" she cried, blushing to her temples. "A young lawyer would do very well."

The clerk reflected. He glanced at Honora again, and later in the day she divined what had been going on in his mind.

"Well," he said, "there are a great many. I happen to think of Mr. Wentworth, because he was in the hotel this morning. He is in the Tremont Building."

She thanked him hurriedly, and was driven to the Tremont Building, through the soggy street that faced the still dripping trees of the Common. Mounting in the elevator, she read on the glass door amongst the names of the four members of the firm that of Alden Wentworth, and suddenly found herself face to face with the young man, in his private office. He was well groomed and deeply tanned, and he rose to meet her with a smile that revealed a line of perfect white teeth.

"How do you do, Mrs. Spence?" he said. "I did not think, when I met you at Mrs. Grenfell's, that I should see you so soon in Boston. Won't you sit down?"

Honora sat down. There seemed nothing else to do. She remembered him perfectly now, and she realized that the nimble-witted clerk had meant to send her to a gentleman.

"I thought," she faltered, "I thought I was coming to a — a stranger. They gave me your address at the hotel — when I asked for a lawyer."

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Wentworth, delicately, "perhaps you would prefer to go to some one else. I can give you any number of addresses, if you like."

She looked up at him gratefully. He seemed very human and understanding, — very honourable. He belonged to her generation, after all, and she feared an older man.

"If you will be kind enough to listen to me, I think — I will stay here. It is only a matter of — of knowledge of the law." She looked at him again, and the pathos of her smile went straight to his heart. For Mr. Wentworth possessed that organ, although he did not wear it on his sleeve.

He crossed the room, closed the door, and sat down beside her.

"Anything I can do," he said.

She glanced at him once more, helplessly.

"I do not know how to tell you," she began. "It all seems so dreadful." She paused, but he had the lawyer's gift of silence — of sympathetic silence. "I want to get a divorce from my husband."

If Mr. Wentworth was surprised, he concealed it admirably. His attitude of sympathy did not change, but he managed to ask her, in a business-like tone which she welcomed: —

"On what grounds?"

"I was going to ask you that question," said Honora.

This time Mr. Wentworth was surprised — genuinely so, and he showed it.

"But, my dear Mrs. Spence," he protested, "you must remember that — that I know nothing of the case."

"What are the grounds one can get divorced on?" she asked.

He coloured a little under his tan.

"They are different in different states," he replied. "I think — perhaps — the best way would be to read you the Massachusetts statutes."

"No — wait a moment," she said. "It's very simple, after all, what I have to tell you. I don't love my husband, and he doesn't love me, and it has become torture to live together. I have left him with his knowledge and consent, and he understands that I will get a divorce."

Mr. Wentworth appeared to be pondering — perhaps not wholly on the legal aspects of the case thus naïvely presented. Whatever may have been his private comments, they were hidden. He pronounced tentatively, and a little absently, the word "desertion."

"If the case could possibly be construed as desertion on your husband's part, you could probably get a divorce in three years in Massachusetts."

"Three years!" cried Honora, appalled. "I could never wait three years!"

She did not remark the young lawyer's smile, which revealed a greater knowledge of the world than one would have suspected. He said nothing, however.

"Three years!" she repeated. "Why, it can't be, Mr. Wentworth. There are the Waterfords — she was Mrs. Boutwell, you remember. And — and Mrs. Rindge — it was scarcely a year before —"

He had the grace to nod gravely, and to pretend not to notice the confusion in which she halted. Lawyers, even young ones with white teeth and clear eyes, are apt to be a little cynical. He had doubtless seen from the beginning that there was a man in the background. It was not his business to comment or to preach.

"Some of the western states grant divorces on — on much easier terms," he said politely. "If you care to wait, I will go into our library and look up the laws of those states."

"I wish you would," answered Honora. "I don't think I could bear to spend three years in such — in such an anomalous condition. And at any rate I should much rather go West, out of sight, and have it all as quickly over with as possible."

He bowed, and departed on his quest. And Honora waited, at moments growing hot at the recollection of her conversation with him. Why — she asked herself — should the law make it so difficult, and subject her to such humiliation in a course which she felt to be right and natural and noble? Finally, her thoughts becoming too painful, she got up and looked out of the window. And far below her, through the mist, she beheld the burying-ground of Boston's illustrious dead which her cabman had pointed out to her as he passed. She did not hear the door open as Mr. Wentworth returned, and she started at the sound of his voice.

"I take it for granted that you are really serious in this matter, Mrs. Spence," he said.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

"And that you have thoroughly reflected," he continued imperturbably. Evidently, in spite of the cold impartiality of the law, a New England conscience had assailed him in the library. "I cannot take — er — the responsibility of advising you as to a course of action. You have asked me the laws of certain western states as to divorce — I will read them."

An office boy followed him, deposited several volumes on the table, and Mr. Wentworth read from them in a voice magnificently judicial.

"There's not much choice, is there?" she faltered, when he had finished.

He smiled.

"As places of residence —" he began, in an attempt to relieve the pathos.

"Oh, I didn't mean that," she cried. "Exile is — is exile." She flushed. After a few moments of hesitation she named at random a state the laws of which required a six months' residence. She contemplated him. "I hardly dare to ask you to give me the name of some reputable lawyer out there."

He had looked for an instant into her eyes. Men of the law are not invulnerable, particularly at Mr. Wentworth's age, and New England consciences to the contrary notwithstanding. In spite of himself, her eyes had made him a partisan: an accomplice, he told himself afterwards.

"Really, Mrs. Spence," he began, and caught another appealing look. He remembered the husband now, and a lecture on finance in the Grenfell smoking room which Howard Spence had delivered, and which had grated on Boston sensibility. "It is only right to tell you that our firm does not — does not — take divorce cases — as a rule. Not that we are taking this one," he added hurriedly. "But as a friend —"

"Oh, thank you!" said Honora.

"Merely as a friend who would be glad to do you a service," he continued, "I will, during the day, try to get you the name of — of as reputable a lawyer as possible in that place."

And Mr. Wentworth paused, as red as though he had asked her to marry him.

"How good of you!" she cried. "I shall be at the Touraine until this evening."

He escorted her through the corridor, bowed her into the elevator, and her spirits had risen perceptibly as she got into her cab and returned to the hotel. There, she studied railroad folders. One confidant was enough, and she dared not even ask the head porter the way to a locality where — it was well known — divorces were sold across a counter. And as she worked over the intricacies of this problem the word her husband had applied to her action recurred to her — *precipitate*. No doubt Mr. Wentworth, too, had thought her precipitate. Nearly every important act of her life had been precipitate. But she was conscious in this instance of no regret. Delay, she felt, would have killed her. Let her exile begin at once.

She had scarcely finished luncheon when Mr. Wentworth was announced. For reasons best known to himself he had come in person; and he handed her, written on a card, the name of the Honourable David Beckwith.

"I'll have to confess I don't know much about him, Mrs. Spence," he said, "except that he has been in Congress, and is one of the prominent lawyers of that state."

The gift of enlisting sympathy and assistance was peculiarly Honora's. And if some one had predicted that morning to Mr. Wentworth that before nightfall he would not only have put a lady in distress on the highroad to obtaining a western divorce (which he had hitherto looked upon as disgraceful), but that likewise he would miss his train for Pride's Crossing, buy the lady's tickets, and see her off at the South Station for Chicago, he would have regarded the prophet as a lunatic. But that is precisely what Mr. Wentworth did. And when, as her train pulled out, Honora bade him good-by, she felt the tug at her heartstrings which comes at parting with an old friend.

"And anything I can do for you here in the East, while — while you are out there, be sure to let me know," he said.

She promised and waved at him from the platform as he stood motionless, staring after her. Romance had spent a whole day in Boston! And with Mr. Alden Wentworth, of all people!

Fortunately for the sanity of the human race, the tension of grief is variable. Honora, closed in her stateroom, eased herself that night by writing a long, if somewhat undecipherable, letter to Chiltern; and was able, the next day, to read the greater portion of a novel. It was only when she arrived in Chicago, after nightfall, that loneliness again assailed her. She was within nine hours — so the time-table said — of St. Louis! Of all her trials, the homesickness which she experienced as she drove through the deserted streets of the metropolis of the Middle West was perhaps the worst. A great city on Sunday night! What traveller has not felt the depressing effect of it? And, so far as the incoming traveller is concerned, Chicago does not put her best foot forward. The way from the station to the Auditorium Hotel was hacked and bruised — so it seemed — by the cruel battle of trade. And she stared, in a kind of fascination that increased the ache in her heart, at the ugliness and cruelty of the twentieth century.

To have imagination is unquestionably to possess a great capacity for suffering, and Honora was paying the penalty for hers. It ran riot now. The huge buildings towered like formless monsters against the blackness of the sky: under the sickly blue of the electric lights, across the dirty, foot-scarred pavements, strange black human figures seemed to wander aimlessly: an elevated train thundered overhead. And presently she found herself the tenant of two rooms in that vast refuge of the homeless, the modern hotel, where she sat until the small hours looking down upon the myriad lights of the shore front, and out beyond them on the black waters of an inland sea.

From Newport to Salomon City, in a state not far from the Pacific tier, is something of a transition in less than a week, though in modern life we should be surprised at nothing. Limited trains are wonderful enough; but what shall be said of the modern mind, that travels faster than light? and much too fast for the pages of a chronicle. Martha Washington and the good ladies of her acquaintance knew nothing about the upper waters of the Missouri, and the words "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer" were not merely literature to them.

Nous avons changé tout cela, although there are yet certain crudities to be eliminated. In these enlightened times, if in one week a lady is not entirely at home with husband number one, in the next week she may have travelled in comparative comfort some two-thirds across a continent, and be on the highroad to husband number two. Why travel? Why have to put up with all this useless expense and worry and waste of time? Why not have one's divorce sent, C.O.D., to one's door, or establish a new branch of the Post-office Department? American enterprise has surely lagged in this.

Seated in a plush-covered rocking-chair that rocked on a track of its own, and thus saved the yellow-and-red hotel carpet, the Honourable Dave Beckwith patiently explained the vexatious process demanded by his particular sovereign state before she should consent to cut the Gordian knot of marriage. And his state — the Honourable Dave remarked — was in the very forefront of enlightenment in this respect: practically all that she demanded was that ladies in Mrs. Spence's predicament should become, *pro tempore*, her citizens. Married misery did not exist in the Honourable Dave's state, amongst her own *bona fide* citizens. And, by a wise provision in the Constitution of our glorious American Union, no one state could tie the nuptial knot so tight that another state could not cut it at a blow.

Six months' residence, and a whole year before the divorce could be granted! Honora looked at the plush rocking-chair, the yellow-and-red carpet, the inevitable ice-water on the marble-topped table, and the picture of a lady the shape of a liqueur bottle playing tennis in the late eighties, and sighed. For one who is sensitive to surroundings, that room was a torture chamber.

"But Mr. Beckwith," she exclaimed, "I never could spend a year here! Isn't there a house I could get that is a — a little — a little better furnished? And then there is a certain publicity about staying at a hotel."

The Honourable Dave might have been justly called the friend of ladies in a temporary condition of loneliness. His mission in life was not merely that of a liberator, but his natural goodness led him to perform a hundred acts of kindness to make as comfortable as possible the purgatory of the unfortunates under his charge. He was a man of a remarkable appearance, and not to be lightly forgotten. His hair, above all, fascinated Honora, and she found her eyes continually returning to it. So incredibly short it was, and so incredibly stiff, that it reminded her of the needle points on the cylinder of an old-fashioned music-box; and she wondered, if it were properly inserted, what would be the resultant melody.

The Honourable Dave's head was like a cannon-ball painted white. Across the top of it (a blemish that would undoubtedly have spoiled the tune) was a long scar, — a relic of one of the gentleman's many personal difficulties. He who made the scar, Honora reflected, must have been a strong man. The Honourable Dave, indeed, had fought his way upward through life to the Congress of the United States; and many were the harrowing tales of frontier life he told Honora in the long winter evenings when the blizzards came down the river valley. They would fill a book; unfortunately, not this book. The growing responsibilities of taking care of the lonely ladies that came in increasing numbers to Salomon City from the effeter portions of the continent had at length compelled him to give up his congressional career. The Honourable Dave was unmarried; and, he told Honora, not likely to become so. He was thus at once human and invulnerable, a high priest dedicated to freedom.

It is needless to say that the plush rocking-chair and the picture of the liqueur-bottle lady did not jar on his sensibilities. Like an eminent physician who has never himself experienced neurosis, the Honourable Dave firmly believed that he understood the trouble from which his client was suffering. He had seen many cases of it in ladies from the Atlantic coast: the first had surprised him, no doubt. Salomon City, though it contained the great Boon, was not æsthetic. Being a keen student of human nature, he rightly supposed that she would not care to join the colony, but he thought it his duty to mention that there was a colony.

Honora repeated the word.

"Out there," he said, waving his cigar to the westward, "some of the ladies have ranches." Some of the gentlemen, too, he added, for it appeared that exiles were not confined to one sex. "It's social — a little too social, I guess," declared Mr. Beckwith, "for you." A delicate compliment of differentiation that Honora accepted gravely. "They've got a casino, and they burn a good deal of electricity first and last. They don't bother Salomon City much. Once in a while, in the winter, they come in a bunch to the theatre. Soon as I looked at you I knew you wouldn't want to go there."

Her exclamation was sufficiently eloquent.

"I've got just the thing for you," he said. "It looks a little as if I was reaching out into the sanitarium business. Are you acquainted by any chance with Mrs. Boutwell, who married a fellow named Waterford?" he asked, taking momentarily out of his mouth the cigar he was smoking by permission.

Honora confessed, with no great enthusiasm, that she knew the present Mrs. Waterford. Not the least of her tribulations had been to listen to a partial recapitulation, by the Honourable Dave, of the ladies he had assisted to a transfer of husbands. What, indeed, had these ladies to do with her? She felt that the very mention of them tended to soil the pure garments of her martyrdom.

"What I was going to say was this," the Honourable Dave continued. "Mrs. Boutwell — that is to say Mrs. Waterford — couldn't stand this hotel any more than you, and she felt like you do about the colony, so she rented a little house up on Wylie Street and furnished it from the East. I took the furniture off her hands: it's still in the house, by the way, which hasn't been rented. For I figured it out that another lady would be coming along with the same notions. Now you can look at the house any time you like."

Although she had to overcome the distaste of its antecedents, the house, or rather the furniture, was too much of a find in Salomon City to be resisted. It had but six rooms, and was of wood, and painted grey, like its twin beside it. But Mrs. Waterford had removed the stained-glass window-lights in the front door, deftly hidden the highly ornamental steam radiators, and made other eliminations and improvements, including the white bookshelves that still contained the lady's winter reading — fifty or more yellow-and-green-backed French novels and plays. Honora's first care, after taking possession, was to order her maid to remove these from her sight: but it is to be feared that they found their way, directly, to

Mathilde's room. Honora would have liked to fumigate the house; and yet, at the same time, she thanked her stars for it. Mr. Beckwith obligingly found her a cook, and on Thursday evening she sat down to supper in her tiny dining room. She had found a temporary haven, at last.

Suddenly she remembered that it was an anniversary. One week ago that day, in the old garden at Beaulieu, had occurred the momentous event that had changed the current of her life!

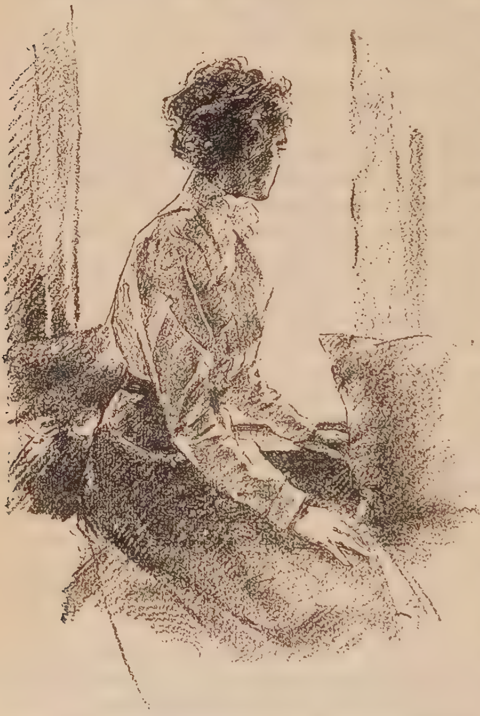
CHAPTER IX

WYLIE STREET

THERE was a little spindle-supported porch before Honora's front door, and had she chosen she might have followed the example of her neighbours and sat there in the evenings. She preferred to watch the life about her from the window-seat in the little parlour. The word exile suggests, perhaps, to those who have never tried it, empty wastes, isolation, loneliness. She had been prepared for these things, and Wylie Street was a shock to her: in sending her there at this crisis in her life fate had perpetrated nothing less than a huge practical joke. Next door, for instance, in the twin house to hers, flaunted in the face of liberal divorce laws, was a young couple with five children. Honora counted them, from the eldest ones that ran over her little grass plot on their way to and from the public school, to the youngest that spent much of his time gazing skyward from a perambulator on the sidewalk. Six days of the week, about six o'clock in the evening, there was a celebration in the family. Father came home from work! He was a smooth-faced young man whom a fortnight in the woods might have helped wonderfully — a clerk in the big department store.

He radiated happiness. When opposite Honora's front door he would open his arms — the signal for a race across her lawn. Sometimes it was the little girl, with pigtails the colour of pulled molasses candy, who won the prize of the first kiss: again it was her brother, a year her junior; and when he was raised it was seen that the seat of his trousers was obviously double. But each of the five received a reward, and the baby was invariably lifted out of the perambulator. And finally there was a conjugal kiss on the spindled porch.

The wife was a roly-poly little body. In the mornings, at the side windows, Honora heard her singing as she worked, and sometimes the sun struck with a blinding flash the pan she was in the act of shining. And one day she looked up and nodded and smiled. Strange indeed was the effect upon our heroine of that greeting! It amazed Honora herself. A strange current ran through her and left her hot, and even as she smiled and nodded back, unbidden tears rose scalding to her eyes. What was it? Why was it?



She went downstairs to the little bookcase, filled now with volumes that were not trash. For Hugh's sake, she would try to improve herself this winter by reading serious things. But between her eyes and the book was the little woman's smile. A month before, at Newport, how little she would have valued it!

One morning, as Honora was starting out for her lonely walk — that usually led her to the bare clay banks of the great river — she ran across her neighbour on the sidewalk. The little woman was settling the baby for his airing, and she gave Honora the same dazzling smile.

"Good morning, Mrs. Spence," she said.

"Good morning," replied Honora, and in her strange confusion she leaned over the carriage. "Oh, what a beautiful baby!"

"Isn't he!" cried the little woman. "Of all of 'em, I think he's the prize. His father says so. I guess," she added, "I guess it was because I didn't know so much about 'em when they first began to come. You take my word for it, the best way is to leave 'em alone. Don't dandle 'em. It's hard to keep your hands off 'em, but it's right."

"I'm sure of it," said Honora, who was very red.

They made a strange contrast as they stood on that new street, with its new vitrified brick paving and white stone curbs, and new little trees set out in front of new little houses: Mrs. Mayo (for such, Honora's cook had informed her, was her name) in a housekeeper's apron and a shirtwaist, and Honora, almost a head taller, in a walking costume of dark grey that would have done justice to Fifth Avenue. The admiration in the little woman's eyes was undisguised.

"You're getting a bill, I hear," she said, after a moment.

"A bill?" repeated Honora.

"A bill of divorce," explained Mrs. Mayo.

Honora was conscious of conflicting emotions: astonishment, resentment, and — most curiously — of relief that the little woman knew it.

"Yes," she answered.

But Mrs. Mayo did not appear to notice or resent her brevity.

"I took a fancy to you the minute I saw you," she said. "I can't say as much for the other Easterner that was here last year. But I made up my mind that it must be a mighty mean man who would treat you badly."

Honora stood as though rooted to the pavement. She found a reply impossible.

"When I think of my luck," her neighbour continued, "I'm almost ashamed. We were married on fifteen dollars a week. Of course there have been trials, we must always expect that; and we've had to work hard, but it hasn't hurt us." She paused and looked up at Honora, and added contritely: "There! I shouldn't have said anything. It's mean of me to talk of my happiness. I'll drop in some afternoon — if you'll let me — when I get through my work," said the little woman.

"I wish you would," replied Honora.

She had much to think of on her walk that morning, and new resolutions to make. Here was happiness growing and thriving, so far as she could see, without any of that rarer nourishment she had once thought so necessary. And she had come two thousand miles to behold it!

She walked many miles, as a part of the regimen and discipline to which she had set herself. Her haunting horror in this place, as she thought of the colony of which Mr. Beckwith had spoken and of Mrs. Boutwell's row of French novels, was degeneration. She was resolved to return to Chiltern a better and a wiser and a truer woman, unstained by the ordeal. At the outskirts of the town she halted by the river's bank, breathing deeply of the pure air of the vast plains that surrounded her.

She was seated that afternoon at her desk in the sitting-room upstairs when she heard the tinkle of the door-bell, and remembered her neighbour's promise to call. With something of a pang she pushed back her chair. Since the episode of the morning, the friendship of the little woman had grown to have a definite value; for it was no small thing, in Honora's situation, to feel the presence of a warm heart next door. All day she had been thinking of Mrs. Mayo and her strange happiness, and longing to talk with her again, and dreading it. And while she was bracing herself for the trial Mathilde entered with a card.

"Tell Mrs. Mayo I shall be down in a minute," she said.

It was not a lady, Mathilde replied, but a monsieur.

Honora took the card. For a long time she sat staring at it, while Mathilde waited. It read: —

Mr. Peter Erwin.

"Madame will see monsieur?"

A great sculptor once said to the statesman who was to be his model: "Wear your old coat. There is as much of a man in the back of his old coat, I think, as there is in his face." As Honora halted on the threshold, Peter was standing looking out of the five-foot plate-glass window, and his back was to her.

She was suddenly stricken. Not since she had been a child, not even in the weeks just passed, had she felt that pain. And as a child, self-pity seized her — as a lost child, when darkness is setting in, and the will fails and distance appalls. Scalding tears welled into her eyes as she seized the frame of the door, but it must have been her breathing that he heard. He turned and crossed the room to her as she had known he would, and she clung to him as she had so often done in days gone by when, hurt and bruised, he had rescued and soothed her. For the moment, the delusion that his power was still limitless prevailed, and her faith whole again, so many times had he mended a world all awry.

He led her to the window-seat and gently disengaged her hands from his shoulders and took one of them and held it between his own. He did not speak, for his was a rare intuition; and gradually her hand ceased to tremble, and the uncontrollable sobs that shook her became less frequent.

"Why did you come? Why did you come?" she cried.

"To see you, Honora."

"But you might have — warned me."

"Yes," he said, "it's true, I might."

She drew her hand away, and gazed steadfastly at his face.

"Why aren't you angry?" she said. "You don't believe in what I have done — you don't sympathize with it — you don't understand it."

"I have come here to try," he said.

She shook her head.

"You can't — you can't — you never could."

"Perhaps," he answered, "it may not be so difficult as you think."

Grown calmer, she considered this. What did he mean by it? to imply a knowledge of herself?

"It will be useless," she said inconsequently.

"No," he said, "it will not be useless."

She considered this also, and took the broader meaning that such acts are not wasted.

"What do you intend to try to do?" she asked.

He smiled a little.

"To listen to as much as you care to tell me, Honora."

She looked at him again, and an errant thought slipped in between her larger anxieties. Wherever he went, how extraordinarily he seemed to harmonize with his surroundings! At Silverdale, and in the drawing-room of the New York house, and in the little parlour in this far western town. What was it? His permanence? Was it his power? She felt that, but it was a strange kind of power — not like other men's. She felt, as she sat there beside him, that his was a power more difficult to combat. That to defeat it was at once to make it stronger, and to grow weaker. She summoned her pride, she summoned her wrongs: she summoned the ego which had winged its triumphant flight far above his kindly, disapproving eye. He had the ability to make her taste defeat in the very hour of victory. And she knew that, when she fell, he would be there in his strength to lift her up.

"Did — did they tell you to come?" she asked.

"There was no question of that, Honora. I was away when — when they learned you were here. As soon as I returned, I came."

"Tell me how they feel," she said, in a low voice.

"They think only of you. And the thought that you are unhappy overshadows all others. They believe that it is to them you should have come, if you were in trouble, instead of coming here."

"How could I?" she cried. "How can you ask? That is what makes it so hard, that I cannot be with them now. But I should only have made them still more unhappy, if I had gone. They would not have understood — they cannot understand, who have every reason to believe in marriage, why those to whom it has been a mockery and a torture should be driven to divorce."

"Why divorce?" he said.

"Do you mean — do you mean that you wish me to give you the reasons why I felt justified in leaving my husband?"

"Not unless you care to," he replied. "I have no right to demand them. I only ask you to remember, Honora, that you have not explained these reasons very clearly in your letters to your aunt and uncle. They do not understand them. Your uncle was unable, on many accounts, to come here; and he thought that — that as an old friend, you might be willing to talk to me."

"I can't live with — with my husband," she cried. "I don't love him, and he doesn't love me. He doesn't know what love is."

Peter Erwin glanced at her, but she was too absorbed then to see the thing in his eyes. He made no comment.

"We haven't the same tastes, nor — nor the same way of looking at things — the same views about making money — for instance. We became absolute strangers. What more is there to say?" she added, a little defiantly.

"Your husband committed no — flagrant offence against you?" he inquired.

"That would have made him human, at least," she cried. "It would have proved that he could feel — something. No, all he cares for in the world is to make money, and he doesn't care how he makes it. No woman with an atom of soul can live with a man like that."

If Peter Erwin deemed this statement a trifle revolutionary, he did not say so.

"So you just — left him," he said.

"Yes," said Honora. "He didn't care. He was rather relieved than otherwise. If I had lived with him till I died, I couldn't have made him happy."

"You tried, and failed," said Peter.

She flushed.

"I couldn't have made him happier," she declared, correcting herself. "He has no conception of what real happiness is. He thinks he is happy,—he doesn't need me. He'll be much more—contented without me. I have nothing against him. I was to blame for marrying him, I know. But I have only one life to live, and I can't throw it away, Peter, I can't. And I can't believe that a woman and a man were intended to live together without love. It is too horrible. Surely that isn't your idea of marriage!"

"My idea of marriage isn't worth very much, I'm afraid," he said. "If I talked about it, I should have to confine myself to theories and—and dreams."

"The moment I saw your card, Peter, I knew why you had come here," she said, trying to steady her voice. "It was to induce me to go back to my husband. You don't know how it hurts me to give you pain. I love you—I love you as I love Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary. You are a part of me. But oh, you can't understand! I knew you could not. You have never made any mistakes—you have never lived. It is useless. I won't go back to him. If you stayed here for weeks you could not make me change my mind."

He was silent.

"You think that I could have prevented—this, if I had been less selfish," she said.

"Where you are concerned, Honora, I have but one desire," he answered, "and that is to see you happy—in the best sense of the term. If I could induce you to go back and give your husband another trial, I should return with a lighter heart. You ask me whether I think you have been selfish. I answer frankly that I think you have. I don't pretend to say your husband has not been selfish also. Neither of you have ever tried, apparently, to make your marriage a success. It can't be done without an honest effort. You have abandoned the most serious and sacred enterprise in the world as lightly as though it had been a piece of embroidery. All that I can gather from your remarks is that you have left your husband because you have grown tired of him."

"Yes," said Honora, "and you can never realize how tired, unless you knew him as I did. When love dies, it turns into hate."

He rose, and walked to the other end of the room, and turned.

"Could you be induced," he said, "for the sake of your aunt and uncle, if not for your own, to consider a legal separation?"

For an instant she stared at him hopelessly, and then she buried her face in her hands.

"No," she cried. "No, I couldn't. You don't know what you ask."

He went to her, and laid his hand lightly on her shoulder.

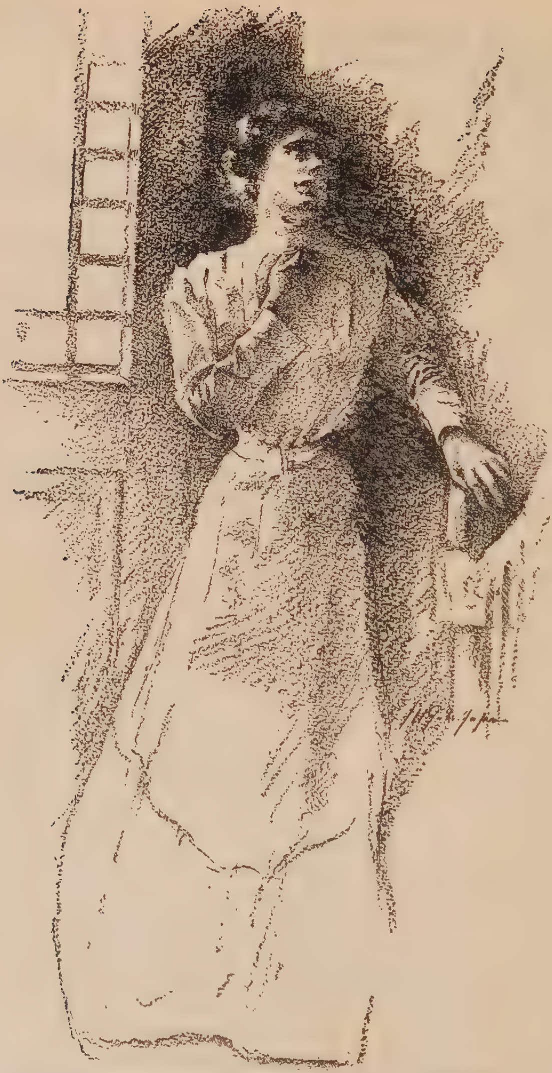
"I think I do," he said.

There was a moment's tense silence, and then she got to her feet and looked at him proudly.

"Yes," she cried, "it is true. And I am not ashamed of it. I have discovered what love is, and what life is, and I am going to take them while I can."

She saw the blood slowly leave his face, and his hands tighten. It was not until then that she guessed at the depth of his wound, and knew that it was unhealed. For him had been reserved this supreme irony, that he should come here to plead for her husband, and learn from her own lips that she loved another man. She was suddenly filled with awe, though he turned away from her that she might not see his face. And she sought in vain for words. She touched his hand, fearfully, and now it was he who trembled.

"Peter," she exclaimed, "why do you bother with me? I — I am what I am. I can't help it. I was made so. I cannot tell you that I am sorry for what I have done — for what I am going to do. I will not lie to you — and you forced me to speak. I know that you don't understand, and that I caused you pain, and that I shall cause — them pain. It may be selfishness — I don't know. God alone knows. Whatever it is, it is stronger than I. It is what I am. Though I were to be thrown into eternal fire I would not renounce it."



FOR A FEW MOMENTS SHE STOOD MOTIONLESS WHERE HE HAD LEFT HER

She looked at him again, and her breath caught. While she had been speaking, he had changed. There was a fire in his eyes she had never seen before, in all the years she had known him.

"Honora," he said quietly, "the man who has done this is a scoundrel."

She stared at him, doubting her senses, her pupils wide with terror.

"How dare you, Peter! How dare you!" she cried.

"I dare to speak the truth," he said, and crossed the room to where his hat was lying and picked it up. She watched him as in a trance. Then he came back to her.

"Some day, perhaps, you will forgive me for saying that, Honora. I hope that day will come, although I shall never regret having said it. I have caused you pain. Sometimes, it seems, pain is unavoidable. I hope you will remember that, with the exception of your aunt and uncle, you have no better friend than I. Nothing can alter that friendship, wherever you go, whatever you do. Good-by."

He caught her hand, held it for a moment in his own, and the door had closed before she realized that he had gone. For a few moments she stood motionless where he had left her, and then she went slowly up the stairs to her own room. . . .

CHAPTER X

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

HAD he, Hugh Chiltern, been anathematized from all the high pulpits of the world, Honora's belief in him could not have been shaken. Ivanhoe and the Knights of the Round Table to the contrary, there is no chivalry so exalted as that of a woman who loves, no courage higher, no endurance greater. Her knowledge is complete; and hers the supreme faith that is unmoved by calumny and unbelief. She alone *knows.* The old Chiltern did not belong to her: hers was the new man sprung undefiled from the sacred fire of their love; and in that fire she, too, had been born again. Peter — even Peter had no power to share such a faith, though what he had said of Chiltern had wounded her — wounded her because Peter, of all others, should misjudge and condemn him. Sometimes she drew consolation from the thought that Peter had never seen him. But she knew he could not understand him, or her, or what they had passed through: that kind of understanding comes alone through experience.

In the long days that followed she thought much about Peter, and failed to comprehend her feelings towards him. She told herself that she ought to hate him for what he had so cruelly said, and at times indeed her resentment was akin to hatred: again, his face rose before her as she had seen it when he had left her, and she was swept by an incomprehensible wave of tenderness and reverence. And yet — paradox of paradoxes — Chiltern possessed her!

On the days when his letters came it was as his emissary that the sun shone to give her light in darkness, and she went about the house with a song on her lips. They were filled, these letters, with an elixir of which she drank thirstily to behold visions, and the weariness of her exile fell away. The elixir of High Purpose. Never was love on such a plane! He lifting her,—no marvel in this; and she—by a magic power of levitation at which she never ceased to wonder—sustaining him. By her aid he would make something of himself which would be worthy of her. At last he had the incentive to enable him to take his place in the world. He pictured their future life at Grenoble until her heart was strained with yearning for it to begin. Here would be duty,—let him who would gainsay it,—duty and love combined with a wondrous happiness. He at a man's labour, she at a woman's; labour not for themselves alone, but for others. A paradise such as never was heard of—a God-fearing paradise, and the reward of courage.

He told her he could not go to Grenoble now and begin the life without her. Until that blessed time he would remain a wanderer, avoiding the haunts of men. First he had cruised in the *Folly*, and then camped and shot in Canada; and again, as winter drew on apace, had chartered another yacht, a larger one, and sailed away for the West Indies, whence the letters came, stamped in strange ports, and sometimes as many as five together. He, too, was in exile until his regeneration should begin.

Well he might be at such a time. One bright day in early winter Honora, returning from her walk across the bleak plains in the hope of letters, found newspapers and periodicals instead, addressed in an unknown hand. It matters not whose hand: Honora never sought to know. She had long regarded as inevitable this acutest phase of her martyrdom, and the long nights of tears when entire paragraphs of the loathed stuff she had burned ran ceaselessly in her mind. Would she had burned it before reading it! An insensate curiosity had seized her, and she had read and read again until it was beyond the reach of fire.

Save for its effect upon Honora, it is immaterial to this chronicle. It was merely the heaviest of her heavy payments for liberty. But what, she asked herself shamefully, would be its effect upon Chiltern? Her face burned that she should doubt his loyalty and love, and yet — the question returned. There had been a sketch of Howard, dwelling upon the prominence into which he had sprung through his connection with Mr. Wing. There had been a sketch of her; and how she had taken what the writer was pleased to call Society by storm: it had been intimated, with a cruelty known only to writers of such paragraphs, that ambition to marry a Chiltern had been her motive! There had been a sketch of Chiltern's career, in carefully veiled but thoroughly comprehensible language, which might have made a Bluebeard shudder. This, of course, she bore best of all; or, let it be said rather, that it cost her the least suffering. Was it not she who had changed and redeemed him?

What tortured her most was the intimation that Chiltern's family connections were bringing pressure to bear upon him to save him from this supremest of all his follies. And when she thought of this the strange eyes and baffling expression of Mrs. Grainger rose before her. Was it true? And if true, would Chiltern resist, even as she, Honora, had resisted, loyally? Might this love for her not be another of his mad caprices?

How Honora hated herself for the thought that thus insistently returned at this period of snows and blasts! It was January. Had he seen the newspapers? He had not, for he was cruising: he had, for of course they had been sent him. And he must have received, from his relatives, protesting letters. A fortnight passed, and her mail contained nothing from him! Perhaps something had happened to his yacht! Visions of shipwreck caused her to scan the newspapers for storms at sea, — but the shipwreck that haunted her most was that of her happiness. How easy it is to doubt in exile, with happiness so far away! One morning, when the wind dashed the snow against her windows, she found it impossible to rise.

If the big doctor suspected the cause of her illness, Mathilde knew it. The maid tended her day and night, and sought, with the tact of her nation, to console and reassure her. The little woman next door came and sat by her bedside. Cruel and infinitely happy little woman, filled with compassion, who brought delicacies in the making of which she had spent precious hours, and which Honora could not eat! The Lord, when he had made Mrs. Mayo, had mercifully withheld the gift of imagination. One topic filled her, she lived to one end: her Alpha and Omega were husband and children, and she talked continually of their goodness and badness, of their illnesses, of their health, of their likes and dislikes, of their accomplishments and defects, until one day a surprising thing happened. Surprising for Mrs. Mayo.

"Oh, don't!" cried Honora, suddenly. "Oh, don't! I can't bear it."

"What is it?" cried Mrs. Mayo, frightened out of her wits. "A turn? Shall I telephone for the doctor?"

"No," replied Honora, "but — but I can't talk any more — to-day."

She apologized on the morrow, as she held Mrs. Mayo's hand.

"It — it was your happiness," she said; "I was unstrung. I couldn't listen to it. Forgive me."

The little woman burst into tears, and kissed her as she sat in bed.

"Forgive you, deary!" she cried. "I never thought."

"It has been so easy for you," Honora faltered.

"Yes, it has. I ought to thank God, and I do — every night."

She looked long and earnestly, through her tears, at the young lady from the far away East as she lay against the lace pillows, her paleness enhanced by the pink gown, her dark hair in two great braids on her shoulders.

"And to think how pretty you are!" she exclaimed.

It was thus she expressed her opinion of mankind in general, outside of her own family circle. Once she had passionately desired beauty, the high school and the story of Helen of Troy notwithstanding. Now she began to look at it askance, as a fatal gift; and to pity, rather than envy, its possessors.

As a by-industry, Mrs. Mayo raised geraniums and carnations in her front cellar, near the furnace, and once in a while Peggy, with the pulled-molasses hair, or chubby Abraham Lincoln, would come puffing up Honora's stairs under the weight of a flower-pot and deposit it triumphantly on the table at Honora's bedside. Abraham Lincoln did not object to being kissed: he had, at least, grown to accept the process as one of the unaccountable mysteries of life. But something happened to him one afternoon, on the occasion of his giving proof of an intellect which may eventually bring him, in the footsteps of his great namesake, to the White House. Entering Honora's front door, he saw on the hall table a number of letters which the cook (not gifted with his brains) had left there. He seized them in one fat hand, while with the other he hugged the flower-pot to his breast, mounted the steps, and arrived, breathless but radiant, on the threshold of the beautiful lady's room, and there calamity overtook him in the shape of one of the thousand articles which are left on the floor purposely to trip up little boys.

Great was the disaster. Letters, geranium, pieces of flower-pot, a quantity of black earth, and a howling Abraham Lincoln bestrewed the floor. And similar episodes, in his brief experience with this world, had not brought rewards. It was from sheer amazement that his tears ceased to flow — amazement and lack of breath — for the beautiful lady sprang up and seized him in her arms, and called Mathilde, who eventually brought a white and gold box. And while Abraham sat consuming its contents in ecstasy he suddenly realized that the beautiful lady had forgotten him. She had picked up the letters, every one, and stood reading them with parted lips and staring eyes. . . .

It was Mathilde who saved him from a violent illness, closing the box and leading him downstairs, and whispered something incomprehensible in his ear as she pointed him homeward.

"Le vrai médecin — c'est toi, mon mignon."

There was a reason why Chiltern's letters had not arrived, and great were Honora's self-reproach and penitence. With a party of Englishmen he had gone up into the interior of a Central American country to visit some famous ruins. He sent her photographs of them, and of the Englishmen, and of himself. Yes, he had seen the newspapers. If she had not seen them, she was not to read them if they came to her. And if she had, she was to remember that their love was too sacred to be soiled, and too perfect to be troubled. As for himself, as she knew, he was a changed man, who thought of his former life with loathing. She had made him clean, and filled him with a new strength.

The winter passed. The last snow melted on the little grass plot, which changed by patches from brown to emerald green; and the children ran over it again, and tracked it in the soft places, but Honora only smiled. Warm, still days were interspersed between the windy ones, when the sky was turquoise blue, when the very river banks were steeped in new colours, when the distant, shadowy mountains became real. Liberty ran riot within her. If he thought with loathing on his former life, so did she. Only a year ago she had been penned up in a New York street in that prison-house of her own making, hemmed in by surroundings which she had now learned to detest from her soul.

A few more penalties remained to be paid, and the heaviest of these was her letter to her aunt and uncle. Even as they had accepted other things in life, so had they accepted the hardest of all to bear — Honora's divorce. A memorable letter her Uncle Tom had written her after Peter's return to tell them that remonstrances were useless! She was their daughter in all but name, and they would not forsake her. When she should have obtained her divorce, she should go back to them. Their house, which had been her home, should always remain so. Honora wept and pondered long over that letter. Should she write and tell them the truth, as she had told Peter? It was not because she was ashamed of the truth that she had kept it from them throughout the winter: it was because she wished to spare them as long as possible. Cruellest circumstance of all, that a love so divine as hers should not be understood by them, and should cause them infinite pain!

The weeks and months slipped by. Their letters, after that first one, were such as she had always received from them: accounts of the weather, and of the doings of her friends at home. But now the time was at hand when she must prepare them for her marriage with Chiltern; for they would expect her in St. Louis, and she could not go there. And if she wrote them, they might try to stop the marriage, or at least to delay it for some years.

Was it possible that a lingering doubt remained in her mind that to postpone her happiness would perhaps be to lose it? In her exile she had learned enough to know that a divorced woman is like a rudderless ship at sea, at the mercy of wind and wave and current. She could not go back to her life in St. Louis: her situation there would be unbearable: her friends would not be the same friends. No, she had crossed her Rubicon and destroyed the bridge: deep within her she felt that delay would be fatal, both to her and Chiltern. Long enough had the banner of their love been trailed in the dust.

Summer came again, with its anniversaries and its dragging, interminable weeks: demoralizing summer, when Mrs. Mayo quite frankly appeared at her side window in a dressing sacque, and Honora longed to do the same. But time never stands absolutely still, and the day arrived when Mr. Beckwith called in a carriage. Honora, with an audibly beating heart, got into it, and they drove down town, past the department store where Mr. Mayo spent his days, and new blocks of banks and business houses that flanked the wide street, where the roaring and clanging of the ubiquitous trolley cars resounded.

Honora could not define her sensations — excitement and shame and fear and hope and joy were so commingled. The colours of the red and yellow brick had never been so brilliant in the sunshine. They stopped before the new court-house and climbed the granite steps. In her sensitive state, Honora thought that some of the people paused to look after them, and that some were smiling. One woman, she thought, looked compassionate. Within, they crossed the marble pavement, the Honourable Dave handed her into an elevator, and when it stopped she followed him as in a dream to an oak-panelled door marked with a legend she did not read. Within was an office, with leather chairs, a large oak desk, a spittoon, and portraits of grave legal gentlemen on the wall.

"This is Judge Whitman's office," explained the Honourable Dave. "He'll let you stay here until the case is called."

"Is he the judge — before whom — the case is to be tried?" asked Honora.

"He surely is," answered the Honourable Dave. "Whitman's a good friend of mine. In fact, I may say, without exaggeration, I had something to do with his election. Now you mustn't get flustered," he added. "It isn't anything like as bad as goin' to the dentist. It don't amount to shucks, as we used to say in Missouri."

With these cheerful words of encouragement he slipped out of a side door into what was evidently the court room, for Honora heard a droning. After a long interval he reappeared and beckoned her with a crooked finger. She arose and followed him into the court room.

All was bustle and confusion there, and her counsel whispered that they were breaking up for the day. The judge was stretching himself; several men who must have been lawyers, and with whom Mr. Beckwith was exchanging amenities behind the railing, were arranging their books and papers; some of the people were leaving, and others talking in groups about the room. The Honourable Dave whispered to the judge, a tall, lank, cadaverous gentleman with iron-grey hair, who nodded. Honora was led forward. The Honourable Dave, standing very close to the judge and some distance from her, read in a low voice something that she could not catch — supposedly the petition. It was all quite as vague to Honora as the trial of the Jack of Hearts; the buzzing of the groups still continued around the court room, and nobody appeared in the least interested. This was a comfort, though it robbed the ceremony of all vestige of reality. It seemed incredible that the majestic and awful Institution of the ages could be dissolved with no smoke or fire, with such infinite indifference, and so much spitting. What was the use of all the pomp and circumstance and ceremony to tie the knot if it could be cut in the routine of a day's business?

The solemn fact that she was being put under oath meant nothing to her. This, too, was slurred and mumbled. She found herself, trembling, answering questions now from her counsel, now from the judge; and it is to be doubted to this day whether either heard her answers. Most convenient and considerate questions they were. When and where she was married, how long she had lived with her husband, what happened when they ceased to live together, and had he failed ever since to contribute to her support? Mercifully, Mr. Beckwith was in the habit of coaching his wards beforehand. A reputable citizen of Salomon City was produced to prove her residence, and somebody cried out something, not loudly, in which she heard the name of Spence mentioned twice. The judge said, "Take your decree," and picked up a roll of papers and walked away. Her knees became weak, she looked around her dizzily, and beheld the triumphant professional smile of the Honourable Dave Beckwith.

"It didn't hurt much, did it?" he asked. "Allow me to congratulate you."

"Is it — is it all over?" she said, quite dazed.

"Just like that," he said. "You're free."

"Free!" The word rang in her ears as she drove back to the little house that had been her home. The Honourable Dave lifted his felt hat as he handed her out of the carriage, and said he would call again in the evening to see if he could do anything further for her. Mathilde, who had been watching from the window, opened the door, and led her mistress into the parlour.

"It's — it's all over, Mathilde," she said.

"Mon dieu, madame," said Mathilde. "C'est simple comme bonjour!"

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH IT IS ALL DONE OVER AGAIN

ALL morning she had gazed on the shining reaches of the Hudson, their colour deepening to blue as she neared the sea. A gold-bound volume of Shelley, with *his* name on the fly-leaf, lay in her lap. And two lines she repeated softly to herself — two lines that held a vision: —

"*He was as the sun in his fierce youth,*
As terrible and lovely as a tempest;"

She summoned him out of the chaos of the past, and the past became the present, and he stood before her as though in the flesh. Nay, she heard his voice, his laugh, she even recognized again the smouldering flames in his eyes as he glanced into hers, and his characteristic manners and gestures. Honora wondered. In vain, during those long months of exile had she tried to reconstruct him thus — the vision in its entirety would not come: rare, fleeting, partial, and tantalizing glimpses she had been vouchsafed, it is true. The whole of him had been withheld until this breathless hour before the dawn of her happiness.

Yet, though his own impatient spirit had fared forth to meet her with this premature gift of his attributes, she had to fight the growing fear within her. Now that the days of suffering were as they had not been, insistent questions dinned in her ears: was she entitled to the joys to come? What had she done to earn them? Had hers not been an attempt, on a gigantic scale, to cheat the fates? Nor could she say whether this feeling were a wholly natural failure to grasp a future too big, or the old sense of the unreality of events that had followed her so persistently.

The Hudson disappeared. Factories, bridges, beflagged week-end resorts, ramshackle houses, and blocks of new buildings were scattered here and there. The train was running on a causeway between miles of tenements where women and children, overtaken by lassitude, hung out of the windows: then the blackness of the tunnel, and Honora closed her eyes. Four minutes, three minutes, two minutes. . . . The motion ceased. At the steps of the car a uniformed station porter seized her bag, and she started to walk down the long, narrow platform. Suddenly she halted.

"Drop anything, Miss?" inquired the porter.

"No," answered Honora, faintly. He looked at her in concern, and she began to walk on again, more slowly.

It had suddenly come over her that the man she was going to meet she scarcely knew! Shyness seized her, a shyness that bordered on panic. And what was he really like, that she should put her whole trust in him? She glanced behind her: that way was closed: she had a mad desire to get away, to hide, to think. It must have been an obsession that had possessed her all these months. The porter was looking again, and he voiced her predicament.

"There's only one way out, Miss."

And then, amongst the figures massed behind the exit in the grill, she saw him, his face red-bronze with the sea tan, his crisp, curly head bared, his eyes alight with a terrifying welcome; and a tremor of a fear akin to ecstasy ran through her: the fear of the women of days gone by whose courage carried them to the postern or the strand,

and fainted there. She could have taken no step farther —and there was no need. New strength flowed from the hand she held that was to carry her on and on. . . .

He spoke her name. He led her passive, obedient, through the press to the side street, and then he paused and looked into her burning face.

"I have you at last," he said. "Are you happy?"

"I don't know," she faltered. "Oh, Hugh, it all seems so strange! I don't know what I have done."

"I know," he said exultantly; "but to save my soul I can't believe it."

She watched him, bewildered, while he put her maid into a cab, and by an effort roused herself.

"Where are you going, Hugh?"

"To get married," he replied promptly.

She pulled down her veil.

"Please be sensible," she implored. "I've arranged to go to a hotel."

"What hotel?"

"The—the Barnstable," she said. The place had come to her memory on the train. "It's very nice and—and quiet—so I've been told. And I've telegraphed for my rooms."

"I'll humour you this once," he answered, and gave the order.

She got into the carriage. It had blue cushions with the familiar smell of carriage upholstery, and the people in the street still hurried about their business as though nothing in particular were happening. The horses started, and some forgotten key in her brain was touched as Chiltern raised her veil again.

"You'll tear it, Hugh," she said, and perforce lifted it herself. Her eyes met his—and she awoke. Not to memories or regrets, but to the future, for the recording angel had mercifully destroyed his book.

"Did you miss me?" she said.

"Miss you! My God, Honora, how can you ask? When I look back upon these last months, I don't see how I ever passed through them. And you are changed," he said. "I could not have believed it possible, but you are. You are — you are finer."

He had chosen his word exquisitely. And then, as they trotted sedately through Madison Avenue, he strained her in his arms and kissed her.

"Oh, Hugh!" she cried, scarlet, as she disengaged herself, "you mustn't — here!"

"You're free!" he exclaimed. "You're mine at last! I can't believe it! Look at me, and tell me so."

She tried.

"Yes," she faltered.

"Yes — what?"

"Yes. I — I am yours."

She looked out of the window to avoid those eyes. Was this New York, or Jerusalem? Were these the streets through which she had driven and trod in her former life? Her whole soul cried out denial. No episode, no accusing reminiscences stood out — not one: the very corners were changed. Would it all change back again if he were to lessen the insistent pressure on the hand in her lap?

"Honora?"

"Yes?" she answered, with a start.

"You missed me? Look at me and tell me the truth."

"The truth!" she faltered, and shuddered. The contrast was too great — the horror of it too great for her to speak of. The pen of Dante had not been adequate! "Don't ask me, Hugh," she begged, "I can't talk about it — I never shall be able to talk about it. If I had not loved you, I should have died."

How deeply he felt and understood and sympathized she knew by the quivering pressure on her hand. Ah, if he had not! If he had failed to grasp the meaning of her purgatory —!

"You are wonderful, Honora," was what he said in a voice broken by emotion.

She thanked him with one fleeting, tearful glance that was as a grant of all her priceless possessions. The carriage stopped, but it was some moments before they realized it.

"You may come up in a little while," she whispered, "and lunch with me — if you like."

"If I like!" he repeated.

But she was on the sidewalk, following the bell boy into the cool, marble-lined area of the hotel. A smiling clerk handed her a pen, and set the new universe to rocking.

"Mrs. Leffingwell, I presume? We have your telegram."

Mrs. Leffingwell! Who was that person? For an instant she stood blankly holding the pen, and then she wrote rapidly, if a trifle unsteadily: —

"Mrs. Leffingwell and maid." A pause. Where was her home? Then she added the words, "St. Louis."

Her rooms were above the narrow cañon of the side street, looking over the roofs of the inevitable brownstone fronts opposite. While Mathilde, in the adjoining chamber, unpacked her bag, Honora stood gazing out of the sitting-room windows, trying to collect her thoughts. Her spirits had unaccountably fallen, the sense of homelessness that had pursued her all these months overtaken her once more. Never, never, she told herself, would she enter a hotel again alone; and when at last he came she clung to him with a passion that thrilled him the more because he could not understand it.

"Hugh — you will care for me?" she cried.

He kissed away her tears. He could not follow her; he only knew that what he held to him was a woman such as he had never known before. Tender, and again strangely and fiercely tender: an instrument of such miraculous delicacy as to respond, quivering, to the lightest touch; an harmonious and perfect blending of strength and weakness, of joy and sorrow, — of all the warring elements in the world. What he felt was the supreme masculine joy of possession.

At last they sat down on either side of the white cloth the waiter had laid, for even the gods must eat. Not that our deified mortals ate much on this occasion. Vesta presided once more, and after the feast was over gently led them down the slopes until certain practical affairs began to take shape in the mind of the man. Presently he looked at his watch, and then at the woman, and made a suggestion.

"Marry you now — this afternoon!" she cried, aghast. "Hugh, are you in your right senses?"

"Yes," he said, "I'm reasonable for the first time in my life."

She laughed, and immediately became serious. But when she sought to marshal her arguments, she found that they had fled.

"Oh, but I couldn't," she answered. "And besides, there are so many things I ought to do. I — I haven't any clothes."

But this was a plea he could not be expected to recognize. He saw no reason why she could not buy as many as she wanted after the ceremony.

"Is that all?" he demanded.

"No — that isn't all. Can't you see that — that we ought to wait, Hugh?"

"No," he exclaimed, "I can't see it. I can only see that every moment of waiting would be a misery for us both. I can only see that the situation, as it is to-day, is an intolerable one for you."

She had not expected him to see this.

"There are — others to be thought of," she said, after a moment's hesitation.

"What others?"

The answer she should have made died on her lips.

"It seems so — indecorous, Hugh."

"Indecorous!" he cried, and pushed back his chair and rose. "What's indecorous about it? To leave you here alone in a hotel in New York would not only be indecorous, but senseless. How long would you put it off? a week — a month — a year? Where would you go in the meantime, and what would you do?"

"But your friends, Hugh — and mine?"

"Friends! What have they got to do with it?"

It was the woman, now, who for a moment turned practical — and for the man's sake. She loved, and the fair fabric of the future which they were to weave together, and the plans with which his letters had been filled and of which she had dreamed in exile, had become to-day as the stuff of which moonbeams are made. As she looked up at him, eternity itself did not seem long enough for the fulfilment of that love. But he? Would the time not come when he would demand something more? and suppose that something were denied? She tried to rouse herself, to think, to consider a situation in which — her instinct had whispered just once — there must be some hidden danger: but the electric touch of his hand destroyed the process, and made her incapable of reason.

". . . What should we gain by a week's or a fortnight's delay," he was saying, "except so much misery?"

She looked around the hotel sitting-room, and tried to imagine the desolation of it, stripped of his presence. Why not? There was reason in what he said. And yet, if she had known it, it was not to reason she yielded, but to the touch of his hand.

"We will be married to-day," he decreed. "I have planned it all. I have bought the *Adhemar*, the yacht which I chartered last winter. She is here. We'll go off on her together, away from the world, for as long as you like. And then," he ended triumphantly, "then we'll go back to Grenoble and begin our life."

"And begin our life!" she repeated. But it was not to him that she spoke. "Hugh, I positively have to have some clothes."

"Clothes!" His voice expressed his contempt for the mundane thought.

"Yes, clothes," she repeated resolutely.

He looked at his watch once more.

"Very well," he said, "we'll get 'em on the way."

"On the way?" she asked.

"We'll have to have a marriage license, I'm afraid," he explained apologetically.

Honora grew crimson. A marriage license!

She yielded, of course. Who could resist him? Nor need the details of that interminable journey down the crowded artery of Broadway to the Centre of Things be entered into. An ignoble errand, Honora thought; and she sat very still, with flushed cheeks, in the corner of the carriage. Chiltern's finer feelings came to her rescue. He, too, resented this senseless demand of civilization as an indignity to their Olympian loves. And he was a man to chafe at all restraints. But at last the odious thing was over, grim and implacable Law satisfied after he had compelled them to stand in line for an interminable period before his grill, and mingle with those whom he chose, in his ignorance, to call their peers. Honora felt degraded as they emerged with the hateful paper, bought at such a price. The City Hall Park, with its moving streams of people, etched itself in her memory.

"Leave me, Hugh," she said; "I will take this carriage — you must get another one."

For once, he accepted his dismissal with comparative meekness.

"When shall I come?" he asked.

She smiled a little, in spite of herself.

"You may come for me at six o'clock," she replied.

"Six o'clock!" he exclaimed; but accepted with resignation and closed the carriage door. Enigmatical sex!

Enigmatical sex indeed! Honora spent a feverish afternoon, rest and reflection being things she feared. An afternoon in familiar places; and (strangest of all facts to be recorded!) memories and regrets troubled her not at all. Her old dressmakers, her old milliners, welcomed her as one risen, radiant, from the grave; risen, in their estimation, to a higher life. Honora knew this, and was indifferent to the wealth of meaning that lay behind their discretion. Milliners and dressmakers read the newspapers and periodicals — certain periodicals. Well they knew that the lady they flattered was the future Mrs. Hugh Chiltern.

Nothing whatever of an indelicate nature happened. There was no mention of where to send the bill, or of whom to send it to. Such things as she bought on the spot were placed in her carriage. And happiest of all omissions, she met no one she knew. The praise that Madame Barrière lavished on Honora's figure was not flattery, because the Paris models fitted her to perfection. A little after five she returned to her hotel, to a Mathilde in a high state of suppressed excitement. And at six, the appointed fateful hour, arrayed in a new street gown of dark green cloth, she stood awaiting him.

He was no laggard. The bell on the church near by was still singing from the last stroke when he knocked, flung open the door, and stood for a moment staring at her. Not that she had been shabby when he had wished to marry her at noon: no self-respecting woman is ever shabby; not that her present costume had any of the elements of overdress; far from it. Being a woman, she had her thrill of triumph at his exclamation. Diana had no need, perhaps, of a French dressmaker, but it is an open question whether she would have scorned them. Honora stood motionless, but her smile for him was like the first quivering shaft of day. He opened a box, and with a strange mixture of impetuosity and reverence came forward. And she saw that he held in his hand a string of great, glistening pearls.

"They were my mother's," he said. "I have had them restrung — for you."

"Oh, Hugh!" she cried. She could find no words to express the tremor within. And she stood passively, her eyes half closed, while he clasped the string around the lace collar that pressed the slender column of her neck — and kissed her.

Even the humble beings who work in hotels are responsive to unusual disturbances in the ether. At the Barnstable, a gala note prevailed: bell boys, porters, clerk, and cashier, proud of their sudden wisdom, were wreathed in smiles. A new automobile, in Chiltern's colours, with his crest on the panel, was panting beside the curb.

"I meant to have had it this morning," he apologized as he handed her in, "but it wasn't ready in time."

Honora heard him, and said something in reply. She tried in vain to rouse herself from the lethargy into which she had fallen, to cast off the spell. Up Fifth Avenue they sped, past meaningless houses, to the Park. The crystal air of evening was suffused with the level evening light; and as they wound in and out under the spreading trees she caught glimpses across the shrubbery of the deepening blue of waters. Pools of mystery were her eyes.

The upper West Side is a definite place on the map, and full, undoubtedly, of palpitating human joys and sorrows. So far as Honora was concerned, it might have been Bagdad. The automobile had stopped before a residence, and she found herself mounting the steps at Chiltern's side. A Swedish maid opened the door.

"Is Mr. White at home?" Chiltern asked.

It seemed that "the Reverend Mr. White" was. He appeared, a portly gentleman with frock coat and lawn tie who resembled the man in the moon. His head, like polished ivory, increased the beaming effect of his welcome, and the hand that pressed Honora's was large and soft and warm. But dreams are queer things, in which no events surprise us.

The reverend gentleman, as he greeted Chiltern, pronounced his name with unction. His air of hospitality, of good-fellowship, of taking the world as he found it, could not have been improved upon. He made it apparent at once that nothing could surprise him. It was the most natural circumstance in life that two people should arrive at his house in an automobile at half-past six in the evening and wish to get married: if they chose this method instead of the one involving awnings and policemen and uncomfortably-arrayed relations and friends, it was none of Mr. White's affair. He led them into the Gothic sanctum at the rear of the house where the famous sermons were written that shook the sounding-board of the temple where the gentleman preached,—the sermons that sometimes got into the newspapers. Mr. White cleared his throat.

"I am—very familiar with your name, Mr. Chiltern," he said, "and it is a pleasure to be able to serve you, and the lady who is so shortly to be your wife. Your servant arrived with your note at four o'clock. Ten minutes later, and I should have missed him."

And then Honora heard Chiltern saying somewhat coldly: —

"In order to save time, Mr. White, I wish to tell you that Mrs. Leffingwell has been divorced — "

The Reverend Mr. White put up a hand before him, and looked down at the carpet, as one who would not dwell upon painful things.

"Unfortunate — ahem — mistakes will occur in life, Mr. Chiltern — in the best of lives," he replied. "Say no more about it. I am sure, looking at you both — "

"Very well then," said Chiltern brusquely, "I knew you would have to know. And here," he added, "is an essential paper."

A few minutes later, in continuation of the same strange dream, Honora was standing at Chiltern's side and the Reverend Mr. White was addressing them. What he said — a part of it at least — seemed curiously familiar. Chiltern put a ring on a finger of her ungloved hand. It was a supreme moment in her destiny — this she knew. Between her responses she repeated it to herself, but the mighty fact refused to be registered. And then, suddenly, rang out the words: —

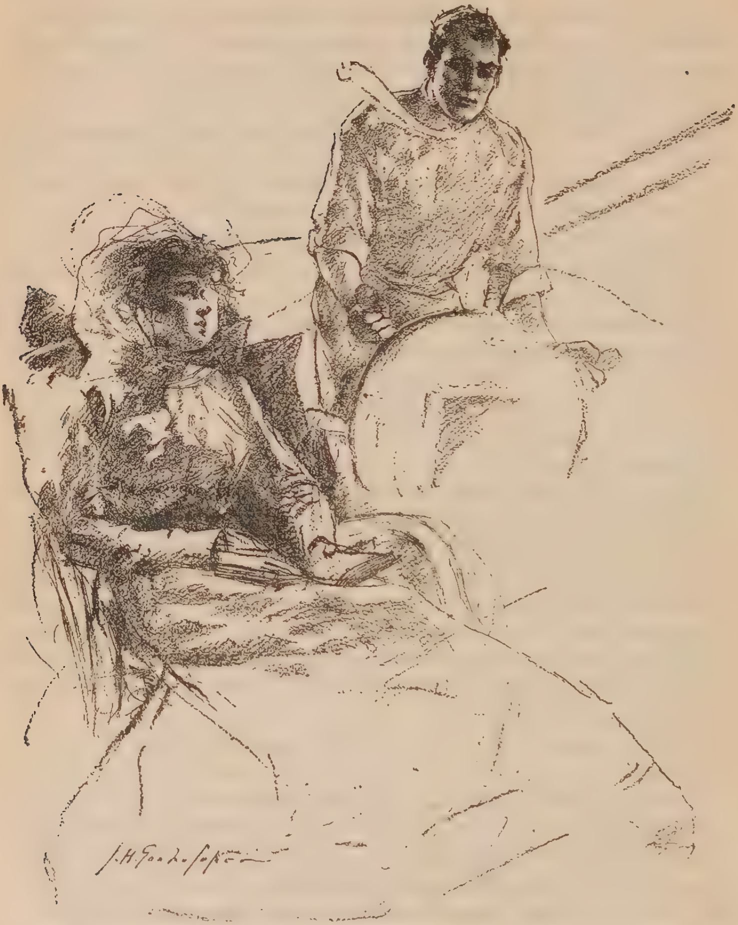
"*Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.*"

Those whom God hath joined together! Mr. White was congratulating her. Other people were in the room — the minister's son, his wife, his brother-in-law. She was in the street again, in the automobile, without knowing how she got there, and Chiltern close beside her in the limousine.

"My wife!" he whispered.

Was she? Could it be true, be lasting, be binding for ever and ever? Her hand pressed his convulsively.

"Oh, Hugh!" she cried, "care for me — stay by me — forever. Will you promise?"



"I promise, Honora," he repeated. "Henceforth we are one."

Honora would have prolonged forever that honeymoon on summer seas. In those blissful days she was content to sit by the hour watching him as, bareheaded in the damp salt breeze, he sailed the great schooner and gave sharp orders to the crew. He was a man who would be obeyed, and even his flashes of temper pleased her. He was her master, too, and she gloried in the fact. By the aid of the precious light within her, she studied him.

He loved her mightily, fiercely, but withal tenderly. With her alone he was infinitely tender, and it seemed that something in him cried out for battle against the rest of the world. He had his way, in port and out of it. He brooked no opposition, and delighted to carry, against his captain's advice, more canvas than was wise when it blew heavily. But the yacht, like a woman, seemed a creature of his will; to know no fear when she felt his guiding hand, even though the green water ran in the scuppers.

And every day anew she scanned his face, even as he scanned the face of the waters. What was she searching for? To have so much is to become miserly, to fear lest a grain of the precious store be lost. On the second day they had anchored, for an hour or two, between the sandy headlands of a small New England port, and she had stood on the deck watching his receding figure under the flag of the gasoline launch as it made its way towards the deserted wharves. Beyond the wharves was an elm-arched village street, and above the verdure rose the white cupola of the house of some prosperous sea-captain of bygone times. Honora had not wished to go ashore. First he had begged, and then he had laughed as he had leaped into the launch. She lay in a chaise longue, watching it swinging idly at the dock.

The night before he had written letters and telegrams. Once he had looked up at her as she sat with a book in her hand across the saloon, and caught her eyes. She had been pretending not to watch him.

"Wedding announcements," he said.

And she had smiled back at him bravely. Such was the first acknowledgment between them that the world existed.

"A little late," he observed, smiling in his turn as he changed his pen, "but they'll have to make allowances for the exigencies of the situation. And they've been after me to settle down for so many years that they ought to be thankful to get them at all. I've told them that after a decent period they may come to Grenoble — in the late autumn. We don't want anybody before then, do we, Honora?"

"No," she said faintly; and added, "I shall always be satisfied with you alone, Hugh."

He laughed happily, and presently she went up on deck and stood with her face to the breeze. There were no sounds save the musical beat of the water against the strakes, and the low hum of wind on the towering vibrant sails. One moulten silver star stood out above all others. To the northward, somewhere beyond the spot where sea and sky met in the hidden kiss of night, was Newport,— were his relations and her friends. What did they think? He, at least, had no anxieties about the world, why should she? Their defiance of it had been no greater than that of an hundred others on whom it had smiled benignly. But had not the others truckled more to its conventions? Little she cared about it, indeed, and if he had turned the prow of the *Adhemar* towards the unpeopled places of the earth, her joy would have been untroubled.

One after another the days glided by, while with the sharpened senses of a great love she watched for a sign of the thing that slept in him — of the thing that had driven him home from his wanderings to re-create his life. When it awoke, she would have to share him; now he was hers alone. Her feelings towards this thing did not assume the proportions of jealousy or fear; they were merely alert, vaguely disquieting. The sleeping thing was not a monster. No, but it might grow into one, if its appetite were not satisfied, and blame her!

She told herself that, had he lacked ambition, she could not have loved him, and did not stop to reflect upon the completeness of her satisfaction with the Viking. He seemed, indeed, in these weeks, one whom the sea has marked for its own, and her delight in watching him as he moved about the boat never palled. His nose reminded her of the prow of a ship of war, and his deep-set eyes were continually searching the horizon for an enemy. Such were her fancies. In the early morning when he donned his sleeveless bathing suit, she could never resist the temptation to follow him on deck to see him plunge into the cold ocean: it gave her a delightful little shiver — and he was made like one of the gods of Valhalla.

She had discovered, too, in these intimate days, that he had the Northman's temperament; she both loved and dreaded his moods. And sometimes, when the yacht glided over smoother seas, it was his pleasure to read to her, even poetry and the great epics. That he should be fond of the cruel Scotch ballads she was not surprised; but his familiarity with the book of Job, and his love for it, astonished her. It was a singular library that he had put on board the *Adhemar*.

One evening when the sails flapped idly and the blocks rattled, when they had been watching in silence the flaming orange of the sunset above the amethystine Camden hills, he spoke the words for which she had been waiting.

"Honora, what do you say to going back to Grenoble?"

She succeeded in smiling at him.

"Whenever you like, Hugh," she said.

So the bowsprit of the *Adhemar* was turned homewards; and with every league of water they left behind them his excitement and impatience seemed to grow.

"I can't wait to show it to you, Honora — to see you in it," he exclaimed. "I have so long pictured you there, and our life as it will be."

CHAPTER XII

THE ENTRANCE INTO EDEN

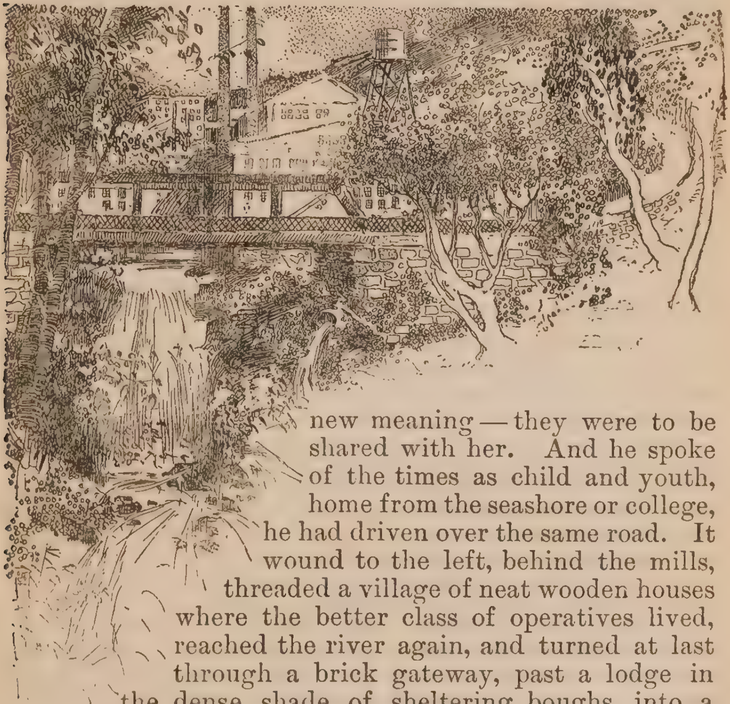
THEY had travelled through the night, and in the early morning left the express at a junction. Honora sat in the straight-backed seat of the smaller train with parted lips and beating heart, gazing now and again at the pearly mists rising from the little river valley they were climbing. Chiltern was like a schoolboy.

"We'll soon be there," he cried, but it was nearly nine o'clock when they reached the Gothic station that marked the end of the line. It was a Chiltern line, he told her, and she was already within the feudal domain. Time indeed that she awoke! She reached the platform to confront a group of upturned, staring faces, and for the moment her courage failed her. Somehow, with Chiltern's help, she made her way to a waiting omnibus backed up against the boards. The footman touched his hat, the grey-headed coachman saluted, and they got in. As the horses started off at a quick trot, Honora saw that the group on the station platform had with one consent swung about to stare after them.

They passed through the main street of the town, lined with plate-glass windows and lively signs, and already bustling with the business of the day, through humbler thoroughfares, and presently rumbled over a bridge that spanned a rushing stream confined between the foundation walls of mills. Hundreds of yards of mills stretched away on either side; mills with windows wide open, and within them Honora heard the clicking and roaring of machinery, and saw the men and women at their daily tasks. Life was a strange thing that they should be doing this while she should be going to live in luxury at a great country place. On one of the walls she read the legend: Chiltern and Company.

"They still keep our name," said Hugh, "although they are in the trust."

He pointed out to her, with an air of pride, every landmark by the roadside. In future they were to have a new meaning — they were to be shared with her. And he spoke of the times as child and youth, home from the seashore or college, he had driven over the same road. It wound to the left, behind the mills, threaded a village of neat wooden houses where the better class of operatives lived, reached the river again, and turned at last through a brick gateway, past a lodge in the dense shade of sheltering boughs, into a wooded drive that climbed, by gentle degrees, a slope. Human care for generations had given to the place a tradition. People had lived here and loved those trees — his people. And could it be that she was to inherit all this, with him? Was her name really Chiltern?



The beating of her heart became a pain when in the distance through the spreading branches she caught a glimpse of the long, low outline of the house, a vision at once familiar and unreal. How often in the months gone by had she called up the memory of the photograph she had once seen, only to doubt the more that she should ever behold that house and these trees with him by her side! They drew up before the door, and a venerable, ruddy-faced butler stood gravely on the steps to welcome them. Hugh leaped out. He was still the schoolboy.

"Starling," he said, "this is Mrs. Chiltern."

Honora smiled tremulously.

"How do you do, Starling?" she said.

"Starling's an old friend, Honora. He's been here ever since I can remember."

The blue eyes of the old servant were fixed on her with a strange, searching expression. Was it compassion she read in them, on this that should be the happiest of her days? In that instant, unaccountably, her heart went out to the old man; and something of what he had seen, and something of what was even now passing within him, came to her intuitively. It was as though, unexpectedly, she had found a friend — and a friend who had had no previous intentions of friendship.

"I'm sure I wish you happiness, madam, — and Mr. Hugh," he said in a voice not altogether firm.

"Happiness!" cried Hugh. "I've never known what it was before now, Starling."

The old man's eyes glistened.

"And you've come to stay, sir?"

"All my life, Starling," said Hugh.

They entered the hall. It was wide and cool, white panelled to the ceiling, with a dark oak floor. At the back of it was an eighteenth-century stairway, with a band of red carpet running up the steps, and a wrought-iron guard with a velvet-covered rail. Halfway up, the stairway divided at a landing, lighted by great triple windows of small panes.

"You may have breakfast in half an hour, Starling," said Chiltern, and led Honora up the stairs into the east wing, where he flung open one of the high mahogany doors on the south side. "These are your rooms, Honora. I have had Keller do them all over for you, and I hope you'll like them. If you don't, we'll change them again."

Her answer was an exclamation of delight. There was a bedroom in pink, with brocaded satin on the walls, and an oriel window thrust out over the garden; a panelled boudoir at the corner of the house, with a marble mantel before which one of Marie Antoinette's duchesses had warmed her feet; and shelves lined with gold-lettered books. From its windows, across the flowering shrubbery and through the trees, she saw the gleaming waters of a lake, and the hills beyond. From this view she turned, and caught her breath, and threw her arms about her husband's neck. He was astonished to see that her eyes were filled with tears.

"Oh, Hugh," she cried, "it's too perfect! It almost makes me afraid."

"We shall be very happy, dearest," he said, and as he kissed her he laughed at the fates.

"I hope so — I pray so," she said, as she clung to him. "But — don't laugh, — I can't bear it."

He patted her cheek.

"What a strange little girl you are!" he said. "I suppose I shouldn't be mad about you if you weren't that way. Sometimes I wonder how many women I have married."

She smiled at him through her tears.

"Isn't that polygamy, Hugh?" she asked.

It was all like a breathless tale out of one of the wonder books of youth. So, at least, it seemed to Honora as she stood, refreshed with a new white linen gown, hesitating on the threshold of her door before descending. Some time the bell must ring, or the cock crow, or the fairy beckon with a wand, and she would have to go back. Back where? She did not know — she could not remember. Cinderella dreaming by the embers, perhaps.

He was awaiting her in the little breakfast room, its glass casements open to the garden with the wall and the round stone seat. The simmering urn, the white cloth, the shining silver, the big green melons that the hot summer sun had ripened for them alone, and Hugh's eyes as they rested on her — such was her illusion. Nor was it quite dispelled when he lighted a pipe and they started to explore their Eden, wandering through chambers with low ceilings in the old part of the house, and larger, higher apartments in the portion that was called new. In the great darkened library, side by side against the Spanish leather on the walls, hung the portraits of his father and mother in heavy frames of gilt.

Her husband was pleased that she should remain so long before them. And for a while, as she stood lost in contemplation, he did not speak. Once she glanced at him, and then back at the stern face of the General, — stern, yet kindly. The eyes, deep-set under bushy brows, like Hugh's, were full of fire; and yet the artist had made them human, too. A dark, reddish brown, close-trimmed mustache and beard hid the mouth and chin. Hugh had inherited the nose, but the father's forehead was wider and fuller. Hugh was at once a newer type, and an older. The face and figure of the General were characteristic of the mid-century American of the northern states, a mixture of boldness and caution and puritanism, who had won his battles in war and commerce by a certain native quality of mind.

"I never appreciated him," said Hugh at length, "until after he died — long after. Until now, in fact. At times we were good friends, and then something he would say or do would infuriate me, and I would purposely make him angry. He had a time and a rule for everything, and I could not bear rules. Breakfast was on the minute, an hour in his study to attend to affairs about the place, so many hours in his office at the mills, in the president's room at the bank, vestry and charity meetings at regular intervals. No movement in all this country round about was ever set on foot without him. He was one to be finally reckoned with. And since his death, many proofs have come to me of the things he did for people of which the world was ignorant. I have found out at last that his way of life was, in the main, the right way. But I know now, Honora," he added soberly, slipping his hand within her arm, "I know now that without you I never could do all I intend to do."

"Oh, don't say that!" she cried. "Don't say that!"

"Why not?" he asked, smiling at her vehemence. "It is not a confession of weakness. I had the determination, it is true. I could — I should have done something, but my deeds would have lacked the one thing needful to lift them above the commonplace — at least for me. You are the inspiration. With you here beside me, I feel that I can take up this work with joy. Do you understand?"

She pressed his hand with her arm.

"Hugh," she said slowly, "I hope that I shall be a help, and not — not a hindrance."

"A hindrance!" he exclaimed. "You don't know, you can't realize, what you are to me."

She was silent, and when she lifted her eyes it was to rest them on the portrait of his mother. And she seemed to read in the sweet, sad eyes a question — a question not to be put into words. Chiltern, following her gaze, did not speak: for a space they looked at the portrait together, and in silence. . . .

From one end of the house to the other they went, Hugh reviving at the sight of familiar objects a hundred memories of his childhood; and she trying to imagine that childhood, so different from her own, passed in this wonderful place. In the glass cases of the gun room, among the shining, blue barrels which he had used in all parts of the world, was the little shotgun his father had had made for him when he was twelve years old. Hugh locked the door after them when they came out, and smiled as he put the key in his pocket.

"My destroying days are over," he declared.

Honora put on a linen hat and they took the gravelled path to the stables, where the horses, one by one, were brought out into the courtyard for their inspection. In anticipation of this hour there was a blood bay for Honora, which Chiltern had bought in New York. She gave a little cry of delight when she saw the horse shining in the sunlight, his nostrils in the air, his brown eyes clear, his tapering neck patterned with veins. And then there was the dairy, with the fawn-coloured cows and calves; and the hillside pastures that ran down to the river, and the farm lands where the stubbled grain was yellowing. They came back by the path that wound through the trees and shrubbery bordering the lake to the walled garden, ablaze in the mellow sunlight with reds and purples, salvias and zinnias, dahlias, gladioli, and asters.

Here he left her for a while, sitting dreamily on the stone bench. *Mrs. Hugh Chiltern, of Grenoble!* Over and over she repeated that name to herself, and it refused somehow to merge with her identity. Yet was she mistress of this fair domain; of that house which had sheltered the race for a century, and the lines of which her eye caressed with a loving reverence; and the Chiltern pearls even then lay hidden around her throat. Her thoughts went back, at this, to the gentle lady to whom they had belonged, and whose look began again to haunt her. Honora's superstition startled her. What did it mean, that look? She tried to recall where she had seen it before, and suddenly remembered that the eyes of the old butler had held something not unlike it. Compassionate — this was the only word that would describe it. No, it had not proclaimed her an intruder, though it may have been ready to do so the moment before her appearance; for there was a note of surprise in it — surprise and compassion.

This was the lady in whose footsteps she was to walk, whose charities and household cares she was to assume! Tradition, order, observance, responsibility, authority — it was difficult to imagine these as a logical part of the natural sequence of her life. She would begin to-day, if God would only grant her these things she had once contemned, and that seemed now so precious. Her life — her real life — would begin to-day. Why not? How hard she would strive to be worthy of this incomparable gift! It was hers, hers! She listened, but the only answer was the humming of the bees in the still September morning.

Chiltern's voice aroused her. He was standing in the breakfast room talking to the old butler.

"You're sure there were no other letters, Starling, besides these bills?"

Honora became tense.

"No, sir," she heard the butler say, and she seemed to detect in his deferential voice the note of anxiety suppressed in the other's. "I'm most particular about letters, sir, as one who lived so many years with your father would be. All that came were put in your study, Mr. Hugh."

"It doesn't matter," answered Chiltern, carelessly, and stepped out into the garden. He caught sight of her, hesitated the fraction of a moment, and as he came forward again the cloud in his eyes vanished. And yet she was aware that he was regarding her curiously.

"What," he said gayly, "still here?"

"It is too beautiful!" she cried. "I could sit here forever."

She lifted her face trustfully, smilingly, to his, and he stooped down and kissed it. . . .

To give the jealous fates not the least chance to take offence, the higher life they were to lead began at once. And yet it seemed at times to Honora as though this higher life were the gift the fates would most begrudge: a gift reserved for others, the pretensions to which were a kind of knavery. Merriment, forgetfulness, music, the dance; the cup of pleasure and the feast of Babylon—these might more readily have been vouchsafed; even deemed to have been bargained for. But to take that which supposedly had been renounced—virtue, sobriety, security, respect—would this be endured? She went about it breathlessly, like a thief.

Never was there a more exemplary household. They rose at half-past seven, they breakfasted at a quarter after eight; at nine, young Mr. Manning, the farm superintendent, was in waiting, and Hugh spent two or more hours in his company, inspecting, correcting, planning; for two thousand acres of the original Chiltern estate still remained. Two thousand acres which, since the General's death, had been at sixes and sevens. The General's study, which was Hugh's now, was piled high with new and bulky books on cattle and cultivation of the soil. Government and state and private experts came and made tests and went away again; new machinery arrived, and Hugh passed hours in the sun, often with Honora by his side, installing it. General Chiltern had been president and founder of the Grenoble National Bank, and Hugh took up his duties as a director.

Honora sought, with an energy that had in it an element of desperation, to keep pace with her husband. For she was determined that he should have no interests in which she did not share. In those first days it was her dread that he might grow away from her, and instinct told her that now or never must the effort be made. She, too, studied farming; not from books, but from him. In their afternoon ride along the shady river road, which was the event of her day, she encouraged him to talk of his plans and problems, that he might thus early form the habit of bringing them to her. And the unsuspecting male in him responded, innocent of the simple subterfuge. After an exhaustive discourse on the elements lacking in the valley soil, to which she had listened in silent intensity, he would exclaim: —

"By George, Honora, you're a continual surprise to me. I had no idea a woman would take an interest in these things, or grasp them the way you do."

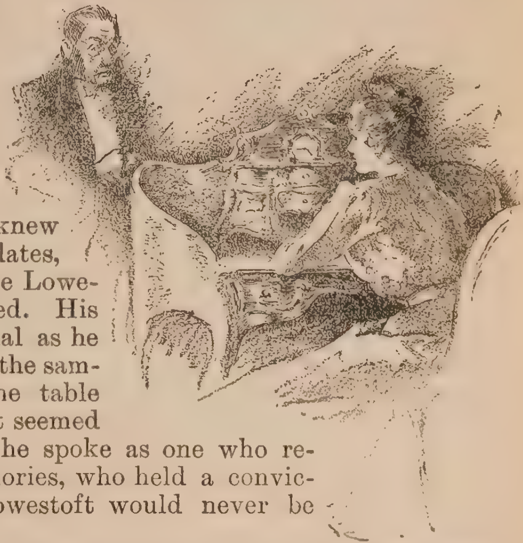
Lordly commendations these, and she would receive them with a flush of gratitude.

Nor was it ever too hot, or she too busy with household cares, for her to follow him to the scene of his operations, whatever these might be: she would gladly stand for an hour listening to a consultation with the veterinary about an ailing cow. Her fear was lest some matter of like importance should escape her. She had private conversations with Mr. Manning, that she might surprise her husband by an unsuspected knowledge. Such were her ruses.

The housekeeper who had come up from New York was the subject of a conjugal conversation.

"I am going to send her away, Hugh," Honora announced. "I don't believe — your mother had one."

The housekeeper's departure was the beginning of Honora's real intimacy with Starling. Complicity, perhaps, would be a better word for the commencement of this relationship. First of all, there was an inspection of the family treasures: the table-linen, the silver, and the china — Sèvres, Royal Worcester, and Minton, and the priceless dinner-set of Lowestoft which had belonged to Alexander Chiltern, reserved for great occasions only: occasions that Starling knew by heart; their dates, and the guests the Lowestoft had honoured. His air was ceremonial as he laid, reverently, the sample pieces on the table before her, but it seemed to Honora that he spoke as one who recalls departed glories, who held a conviction that the Lowestoft would never be used again.



Although by unalterable custom he submitted, at breakfast, the menus of the day to Hugh, the old butler came afterwards to Honora's boudoir during her struggle with the account books. Sometimes she would look up and surprise his eyes fixed upon her, and one day she found at her elbow a long list made out in a painstaking hand.

"What's this, Starling?" she asked.

"If you please, madam," he answered, "they're the current prices in the markets — here."

She thanked him. Nor was his exquisite delicacy in laying stress upon the locality lost upon her. That he realized the magnitude—for her—of the task to which she had set herself; that he sympathized deeply with the spirit which had undertaken it, she was as sure as though he had said so. He helped her thus in a dozen unobtrusive ways, never once recognizing her ignorance; but he made her feel the more that that ignorance was a shameful thing not to be spoken of. Speculations upon him were irresistible. She was continually forgetting the nature of his situation, and he grew gradually to typify in her mind the Grenoble of the past. She knew his principles as well as though he had spoken them — which he never did. For him, the world had become awry; he abhorred divorce, and that this modern abomination had touched the house of Chiltern was a calamity that had shaken the very foundations of his soul. In spite of this, he had remained. Why? Perhaps from habit, perhaps from love of the family and Hugh, — perhaps to see! And having stayed, fascination had laid hold of him, — of that she was sure, — and his affections had incomprehensibly become involved. He was as one assisting at a high tragedy not unworthy of him, the outcome of which he never for an instant doubted. And he gave Honora the impression that he alone, inscrutable, could have pulled aside the curtain and revealed the end.

CHAPTER XIII

OF THE WORLD BEYOND THE GATES

Honora paused in her toilet, and contemplated for a moment the white skirt that her maid presented.

"I think I'll wear the blue pongee to-day, Mathilde," she said.

The decision for the blue pongee was the culmination of a struggle begun with the opening of her eyes that morning. It was Sunday, and the time was at hand when she must face the world. Might it not be delayed a little while — a week longer? For the remembrance of the staring eyes which had greeted her on her arrival at the station at Grenoble troubled her. It seemed to her a cruel thing that the house of God should hold such terrors for her: to-day she had a longing for it that she had never felt in her life before.

Chiltern was walking in the garden, waiting for her to breakfast with him, and her pose must have had in it an element of the self-conscious when she appeared, smilingly, at the door.

"Why, you're all dressed up," he said.

"It's Sunday, Hugh."

"So it is," he agreed, with what may have been a studied lightness — she could not tell.

"I'm going to church," she said bravely.

"I can't say much for old Stopford," declared her husband. "His sermons used to arouse all the original sin in me, when I had to listen to them."

She poured out his coffee.

"I suppose one has to take one's clergyman as one does the weather," she said. "We go to church for something else besides the sermon — don't we?"

"I suppose so, if we go at all," he replied. "Old Stopford imposes a pretty heavy penalty."

"Too heavy for you?" she asked, and smiled at him as she handed him the cup.

"Too heavy for me," he said, returning her smile. "To tell you the truth, Honora, I had an overdose of church in my youth, here and at school, and I've been trying to even up ever since."

"You'd like me to go, wouldn't you, Hugh?" she ventured, after a silence.

"Indeed I should," he answered, and again she wondered to what extent his cordiality was studied, or whether it were studied at all. "I'm very fond of that church, in spite of the fact that — that I may be said to dissemble my fondness." She laughed with him, and he became serious. "I still contribute the family's share toward its support. My father was very proud of it, but it is really my mother's church. It was due to her that it was built."

Thus was the comedy played — and Honora by no means sure that it was a comedy. Even her alert instinct had not been able to detect the acting, and the intervening hours were spent in speculating whether her fears had not been overdone. Nevertheless, under the eyes of Starling, at twenty minutes to eleven she stepped into the victoria with an outward courage, and drove down the shady avenue towards the gates. Sweet-toned bells were ringing as she reached the residence portion of the town, and subdued pedestrians in groups and couples made their way along the sidewalks. They stared at her; and she in turn, with heightened colour, stared at her coachman's back. After all, this first Sunday would be the most difficult.

The carriage turned into a street arched by old elms, and flanked by the houses of the most prosperous townspeople. Some of these were of the old-fashioned, classic type, and others new examples of a national architecture seeking to find itself, — white and yellow colonial, rough-cast modifications of the Shakespearian period, and nondescript mixtures of cobblestones and shingles. Each was surrounded by trim lawns and shrubbery. The church itself was set back from the street. It was of bluish stone, and half covered with Virginia creeper.

At this point, had the opportunity for a secret retreat presented itself, Honora would have embraced it, for until now she had not realized the full extent of the ordeal. Had her arrival been heralded by sounding trumpets, the sensation it caused could not have been greater. In her Eden, the world had been forgotten; the hum of gossip beyond the gates had not reached her. But now, as the horses approached the curb, their restive feet clattering on the hard pavement, in the darkened interior of the church she saw faces turned, and entering worshippers pausing in the doorway. Something of what the event meant for Grenoble dawned upon her: something, not all; but all that she could bear.

If it be true that there is no courage equal to that which a great love begets in a woman, Honora's at that moment was sublime. Her cheeks tingled, and her knees weakened under her as she ran the gantlet to the church door, where she was met by a gentleman on whose face she read astonishment unalloyed: amazement, perhaps, is not too strong a word for the sensation it conveyed to her, and it occurred to her afterwards that there was an element in it of outrage. It was a countenance peculiarly adapted to such an expression — yellow, smooth-shaven, heavy-jowled, with one drooping eye; and she needed not to be told that she had encountered, at the outset, the very pillar of pillars. The frock coat, the heavy watch chain, the square-toed boots, all combined to make a Presence.

An instinctive sense of drama amongst the onlookers seemed to create a hush, as though these had been the unwilling witnesses to an approaching collision and were awaiting the crash. The gentleman stood planted in the inner doorway, his drooping eye fixed on hers.

"I am Mrs. Chiltern," she faltered.

He hesitated the fraction of an instant, but he somehow managed to make it plain that the information was superfluous. He turned without a word and marched majestically up the aisle before her to the fourth pew from the front on the right. There he faced about and laid a protesting hand on the carved walnut, as though absolving himself in the sight of his God and his fellow-citizens. Honora fell on her knees.

She strove to calm herself by prayer: but the glances of a congregation focussed between her shoulder-blades seemed to burn her back, and the thought of the concentration of so many minds upon her distracted her own. She could think of no definite prayer. Was this God's tabernacle? or the market-place, and she at the tail of a cart? And was she not Hugh Chiltern's wife, entitled to his seat in the place of worship of his fathers? She rose from her knees, and her eyes fell on the softly glowing colours of a stained-glass window: *In memoriam* — Alicia Reyburn Chiltern. Hugh's mother, the lady in whose seat she sat.

The organist, a sprightly young man, came in and began turning over his music, and the choir took their places, in the old-fashioned manner. Then came the clergyman. His beard was white, his face long and narrow and shrivelled, his forehead protruding, his eyes of the cold blue of a winter's sky. The service began, and Honora repeated the familiar prayers which she had learned by heart in childhood — until her attention was arrested by the words she spoke: "We have offended against Thy holy laws." Had she? Would not God bless her marriage? It was not until then that she began to pray with an intensity that blotted out the world that He would not punish her if she had done wrong in His sight. Surely, if she lived henceforth in fear of Him, He would let her keep this priceless love which had come to her! And it was impossible that He should regard it as an inordinate and sinful affection — since it had filled her life with light. As the wife of Hugh Chiltern she sought a blessing. Would God withhold it? He would not, she was sure, if they lived a sober and a righteous life. He would take that into account, for He was just.

Then she grew calmer, and it was not until after the doctrinal sermon which Hugh had predicted that her heart began to beat painfully once more, when the gentleman who had conducted her to her seat passed her the plate. He inspired her with an instinctive fear ; and she tried to imagine, in contrast, the erect and soldierly figure of General Chiltern performing the same office. Would he have looked on her more kindly ?

When the benediction was pronounced, she made her way out of the church with downcast eyes. The people parted at the door to let her pass, and she quickened her step, gained the carriage at last, and drove away — seemingly leaving at her back a buzz of comment. Would she ever have the courage to do it again ?

The old butler, as he flung open the doors at her approach, seemed to be scrutinizing her.

" Where's Mr. Chiltern, Starling ? " she asked.

" He's gone for a ride, madame."

Hugh had gone for a ride!

She did not see him until lunch was announced, when he came to the table in his riding clothes. It may have been that he began to talk a little eagerly about the excursion he had made to an outlying farm and the conversation he had had with the farmer who leased it.

" His lease is out in April," said Chiltern, " and when I told him I thought I'd turn the land into the rest of the estate he tried to bribe me into a renewal."

" Bribe you ? "

Chiltern laughed.

" Only in joke, of course. The man's a character, and he's something of a politician in these parts. He intimated that there would be a vacancy in this congressional district next year, that Grierson was going to resign, and that a man with a long purse who belonged to the soil might have a chance. I suppose he thinks I would buy it."

" And — would you like to go to Congress, Hugh ? "

" Well," he said, smiling, " a man never can tell when he may have to eat his words. I don't say I shouldn't — in the distant future. It would have pleased the General. But if I go," he added with characteristic vigour, " it will be in spite of the politicians, not because of them. If I go I shan't go bound, and I'll fight for it. I should enjoy that."

And she was able to accord him the smile of encouragement he expected.

"I am sure you would," she replied. "I think you might have waited until this afternoon and taken me," she reproached him. "You know how I enjoy going with you to those places."

It was not until later in the meal that he anticipated, in an admirably accidental manner, the casual remark she had intended to make about church.

"Your predictions were fulfilled," she answered; "the sermon wasn't thrilling."

He glanced at her. And instead of avoiding his eyes, she smiled into them.

"Did you see the First Citizen of Grenoble?" he inquired.

"I am sure of it," she laughed, "if he's yellow, with a drooping eye and a presence; he was kind enough to conduct me to the pew."

"Yes," he exclaimed, "that's Israel Simpson — you couldn't miss him. How I used to hate him when I was a boy! I haven't quite got over it yet. I used to outdo myself to make things uncomfortable for him when he came up here — I think it was because he always seemed to be truckling. He was ridiculously servile and polite in those days. He's changed since," added Hugh, dryly. "He must quite have forgotten by this time that the General made him."

"Is — is he so much?" said Honora.

Her husband laughed.

"Is it possible that you have seen him and still ask that?" said he. "He *is* Grenoble. Once the Chilterns were. He is the head of the honoured firm of Israel Simpson and Sons, the president of the Grenoble National Bank, the senior warden of the church, a director in the railway. Twice a year, in the columns of the New York newspapers dedicated to the prominent arrivals at the hotels, you may read the name of Israel Simpson of Grenoble. Three times has he been abroad, respectably accompanied by Maria, who invariably returns to read a paper on the cathedrals and art before the Woman's Club."

"Maria is his wife, I suppose."

"Yes. Didn't you run across Maria? She's quite as pronounced, in her way, as Israel. A very tower of virtue."

"I didn't meet anybody, Hugh," said Honora. "I'll — I'll look for her next Sunday. I hurried out. It was a little embarrassing the first time," she added, "your family being so prominent in Grenoble."

Upon this framework, the prominence of his family, she built up during the coming week a new structure of hope. It was strange she had never thought before of this quite obvious explanation for the curiosity of Grenoble. Perhaps — perhaps it was not prejudice, after all! or not all of it. The wife of the Chiltern heir would naturally inspire a considerable interest in any event, and Mrs. Hugh Chiltern in particular. And these people would shortly understand, if they did not now understand, that Hugh had come back voluntarily and from a sense of duty to assume the burdens and responsibilities that so many of his generation and class had shirked. This would tell in their favour, surely. At this point in her meditations she consulted the mirror, to behold a modest, slim-waisted young woman becomingly arrayed in white linen, whose cheeks were aglow with health, whose eyes seemingly reflected the fire of a distant high vision. Not a Poppæa, certainly, nor a Delila. No, it was unbelievable that this, the very field itself of their future labours, should be denied them. Her heart, at the mere conjecture, turned to stone.

During the cruise of the *Adhemar* she had often watched, in the gathering darkness, those revolving lights on headland or shoal that spread now a bright band across the sea, and again left the waters desolate in the night. Thus, ceaselessly revolving from white hope to darker doubt, were her thoughts, until sometimes she feared to be alone with them, and surprised him by her presence in his busiest moments. For he was going ahead on the path they had marked out with a faith in which she could perceive no flaw. If faint and shadowy forms had already come between them, he gave no evidence of having as yet discerned these. There was the absence of news from his family, for instance, — the Graingers, the Stranges, the Shorters, and the Pendletons, whom she had never seen; he had never spoken to her of this, and he seemed to hold it as of no account. Her instinct whispered that it had left its mark, a hidden mark. And while she knew that consideration for her prompted him to hold his peace, she told herself that she would have been happier had he spoken of it.

Always she was brought back to Grenoble when she saw him thus, manlike, with his gaze steadily fixed on the task. If New York itself withheld recognition, could Grenoble — provincial and conservative Grenoble, preserving still the ideas of the last century for which his family had so unflinchingly stood — be expected to accord it? New York! New York was many, many things, she knew. The great house could have been filled from week-end to week-end from New York; but not with Graingers and Pendletons and Stranges; not with those around the walls of whose fortresses the currents of modernity still swept impotently; not with those who, while not contemning pleasure, still acknowledged duty; not with those whose assured future was that for which she might have sold her soul itself. Social free lances, undoubtedly, and unattached men; those who lived in the world of fashion but were not squeamish — Mrs. Kame, for example; and ladies like Mrs. Eustace Rindge, who had tried a second throw for happiness, — such votaries of excitement would undoubtedly have been more than glad to avail themselves of the secluded hospitality of Grenoble for that which they would have been pleased to designate as "a lively time." Honora shuddered at the thought. And, as though the shudder had been prophetic, one morning the mail contained a letter from Mrs. Kame herself.

Mercifully Hugh had not noticed it. Honora did not recognize the handwriting, but she slipped the envelope into her lap, fearful of what it might contain, and, when she gained the privacy of her rooms, read it with quickening breath. Mrs. Kame's touch was light and her imagination sympathetic; she was the most adaptable of the feminine portion of her nation, and since the demise of her husband she had lived, abroad and at home, among men and women of a world that does not dot its i's or cross its t's. Nevertheless, the letter filled Honora with a deep apprehension and a deeper resentment. Plainly and clearly stamped between its delicately worded lines was the claim of a comradeship born of Honora's recent act. She tore the paper into strips and threw it into the flames and opened the window to the cool air of the autumn morning. She had a feeling of contamination that was intolerable.

Mrs. Kame had proposed herself — again the word "delicately" must be used — for one of Honora's first house-parties. Only an acute perception could have read in the lady's praise of Hugh a masterly avoidance of that part of his career already registered on the social slate. Mrs. Kame had thought about them and their wonderful happiness in these autumn days at Grenoble; to intrude on that happiness yet awhile would be a sacrilege. Later, perhaps, they would relent and see something of their friends, and throw open again the gates of a beautiful place long closed to the world. And — without the air of having picked the single instance, but of having chosen from many — Mrs. Kame added that she had only lately seen Elsie Shorter, whose admiration for Honora was greater than ever. A sentiment, Honora reflected a little bitterly, that Mrs. Shorter herself had not taken the pains to convey. Consistency was not Elsie's jewel.

It must perhaps be added for the sake of enlightenment that since going to Newport Honora's view of the writer of this letter had changed. In other words, enlarging ideals had dwarfed her somewhat; it was strictly true that the lady was a boon companion of everybody. Her catholicism had two limitations only: that she must be amused, and that she must not — in what she deemed the vulgar sense — be shocked.

Honora made several attempts at an answer before she succeeded in saying, simply, that Hugh was too absorbed in his work of reconstruction of the estate for them to have house-parties this autumn. And even this was a concession hard for her pride to swallow. She would have preferred not to reply at all, and this slightest of references to his work — and hers — seemed to degrade it. Before she folded the sheet she looked again at that word "reconstruction" and thought of eliminating it. It was too obviously allied to "redemption"; and she felt that Mrs. Kame could not understand redemption, and would ridicule it. Honora went downstairs and dropped her reply guiltily into the mail-bag. It was for Hugh's sake she was sending it, and from his eyes she was hiding it.

And, while we are dealing with letters, one, or part of one, from Honora's aunt, may perhaps be inserted here. It was an answer to one that Honora had written a few days after her installation at Grenoble, the contents of which need not be gone into: we, who know her, would neither laugh nor weep at reading it, and its purport may be more or less accurately surmised from her aunt's reply.

"As I wrote you at the time, my dear," — so it ran — "the shock which your sudden marriage with Mr. Chiltern caused us was great — so great that I cannot express it in words. I realize that I am growing old, and perhaps the world is changing faster than I imagine. And I wrote you, too, that I would not be true to myself if I told you that what you have done was right in my eyes. I have asked myself whether my horror of divorce and remarriage may not in some degree be due to the happiness of my life with your uncle. I am, undoubtedly, an exceptionally fortunate woman; and as I look backwards I see that the struggles and trials which we have shared together were really blessings.

"Nevertheless, dear Honora, you are, as your uncle wrote you, our child, and nothing can alter that fact in our hearts. We can only pray with all our strength that you may find happiness and peace in your new life. I try to imagine, as I think of you and what has happened to you in the few years since you have left us — how long they seem! — I try to imagine some of the temptations that have assailed you in that world of which I know nothing. If I cannot, it is because God made us different. I know what you have suffered, and my heart aches for you.

"You say that experience has taught you much that you could not have learned in any other way. I do not doubt it. You tell me that your new life, just begun, will be a dutiful one. Let me repeat that it is my anxious prayer that you have not builded upon sand, that regrets may not come. I cannot say more. I cannot dissemble. Perhaps I have already said too much.

"Your loving
AUNT MARY."

An autumn wind was blowing, and Honora gazed out of the window at the steel-blue, ruffled waters of the lake. Unconsciously she repeated the words to herself: —

"Builded upon sand!"

CHAPTER XIV

CONTAINING PHILOSOPHY FROM MR. GRAINGER

SWIFTLY came the autumn days, and swiftly went. A bewildering, ever changing, and glorious panorama presented itself, green hillsides struck first with flaming crimsons and yellows, and later mellowing into a wondrous blending of gentler, tenderer hues; lavender, and wine, and the faintest of rose colours where the bare beeches massed. Thus the slopes were spread as with priceless carpets for a festival. Sometimes Honora, watching, beheld from her window the russet dawn on the eastern ridge, and the white mists crouching in strange, ghostly shapes above the lake and the rushing river: and she saw these same mists gather again, shivering, at nightfall. In the afternoon they threaded valleys, silent save for the talk between them and the stirring of the leaves under their horses' feet.

So the Indian summer passed — that breathless season when even happiness has its premonitions and its pangs. The umber fields, all ploughed and harrowed, lay patiently awaiting the coming again of the quickening spring. Then fell the rain, the first, cold winter rain that shrouded the valley and beat down upon the defenceless, dismantled garden and made pools in the hollows of the stone seat: that flung itself against Honora's window as though begrudging her the warmth and comfort within. Sometimes she listened to it in the night.

She was watching. How intent was that vigil, how alert and sharpened her senses, a woman who has watched alone may answer. Now, she felt, was the crisis at hand: the moment when her future, and his, was to hang in the balance. The work on the farms, which had hitherto left Chiltern but little time for thought, had relaxed. In these wet days had he begun to brood a little? Did he show signs of a reversion to that other personality, the Chiltern she had not known, yet glimpses of whom she had had? She recalled the third time she had seen him, the morning at the Lilacs in Newport, that had left upon her the curious sense of having looked on a superimposed portrait. That Chiltern which she called her Viking, and which, with a woman's perversity, she had perhaps loved most of all, was but one expression of the other man of days gone by. The life of that man was a closed book she had never wished to open. Was he dead, or sleeping? And if sleeping, would he awake? How softly she tread!

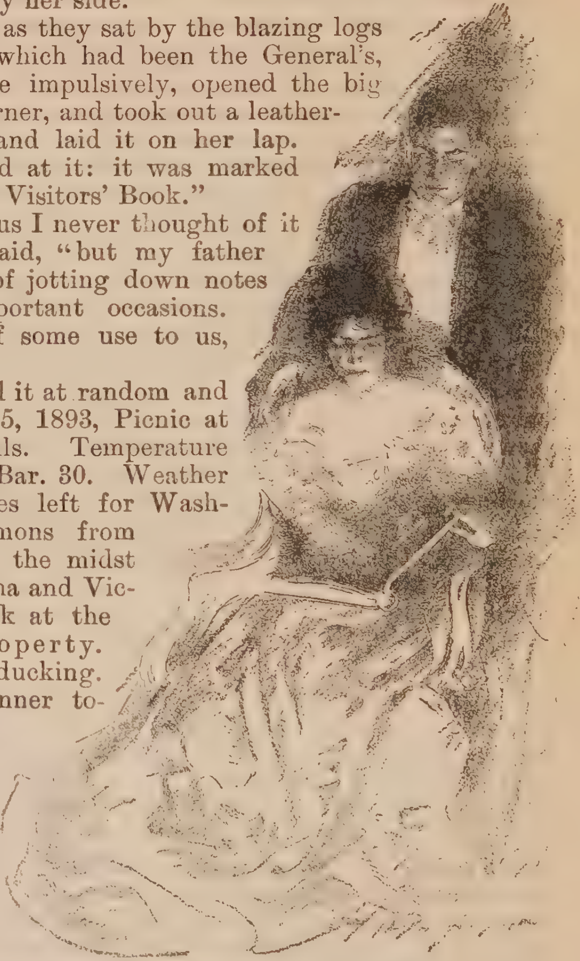
And in these days, with what exquisite, yet tremulous skill and courage did she bring up the subject of that other labour they were to undertake together — the life and letters of his father. In the early dusk, when they had returned from their long rides, she contrived to draw Chiltern into his study. The cheerfulness, the hopefulness, the delight with which she approached the task, the increasing enthusiasm she displayed for the character of the General as she read and sorted the letters and documents, and the traits of his she lovingly traced in Hugh, were not without their effect. It was thus she fanned, ceaselessly and with a smile, and with an art the rarest women possess, the drooping flame. And the flame responded.

How feverishly she worked, unknown to him, he never guessed; so carefully and unobtrusively planted her suggestions that they were born again in glory as his inspiration. The mist had lifted a little, and she beheld the next stage beyond. To reach that stage was to keep him intent on this work — and after that, to publish! Ah, if he would only have patience, or if she could keep him distracted through this winter and their night, she might save him. Love such as hers can even summon genius to its aid, and she took fire herself at the thought of a book worthy of that love, of a book — though signed by him — that would redeem them, and bring a scoffing world to its knees in praise. She spent hours in the big library preparing for Chiltern's coming, with volumes in her lap and a note-book by her side.

One night, as they sat by the blazing logs in his study, which had been the General's, Chiltern arose impulsively, opened the big safe in the corner, and took out a leather-bound book and laid it on her lap. Honora stared at it: it was marked "Highlawns, Visitors' Book."

"It's curious I never thought of it before," he said, "but my father had a habit of jotting down notes in it on important occasions. It may be of some use to us, Honora."

She opened it at random and read: "July 5, 1893, Picnic at Psalter's Falls. Temperature 71 at 9 A.M. Bar. 30. Weather clear. Charles left for Washington, summons from President, in the midst of it. Agatha and Victor again look at the Farrar property. Hugh has a ducking. P.S. At dinner to-night Bessie announces her engagement to Cecil Grainger. Present: Sarah and George Grenfell, Agatha and Victor Strange, Gerald Shorter, Lord Kylie— "



Honora looked up. Hugh was at her shoulder, with his eyes on the page.

"Psalter's Falls!" he exclaimed. "How well I remember that day! I was just home from my junior year at Harvard."

"Who was 'Charles'?" inquired Honora.

"Senator Pendleton — Bessie's father. Just after I jumped into the mill-pond the telegram came for him to go to Washington, and I drove him home in my wet clothes. The old man had a terrible tongue, a whip-lash kind of humour, and he scored me for being a fool. But he rather liked me, on the whole. He told me if I'd only straighten out I could be anything, in reason."

"What made you jump in the mill-pond?" Honora asked, laughing.

"Bessie Grainger. She had a devil in her, too, in those days, but she always kept her head, and I didn't." He smiled. "I'm willing to admit that I was madly in love with her, and she treated me outrageously. We were standing on the bridge — I remember it as though it were yesterday — and the water was about eight feet deep, with a clear sand bottom. She took off a gold bracelet and bet me I wouldn't get it if she threw it in. That night, right in the middle of dinner, when there was a pause in the conversation, she told us she was engaged to Cecil Grainger. It turned out, by the way, to have been his bracelet I rescued. I could have wrung his neck, and I didn't speak to her for a month."

Honora repressed an impulse to comment on this incident. With his arm over her shoulder, he turned the pages idly, and the long lists of guests which bore witness to the former life and importance of Highlawns passed before her eyes. Distinguished foreigners, peers of England, churchmen, and men renowned in literature: famous American statesmen, scientists, and names that represented more than one generation of wealth and achievement — all were here. There were his school and college friends, five and six at a time, and besides them those of young girls who were now women, some of whom Honora had met and known in New York or Newport.

Presently he closed the book abruptly and returned it to the safe. To her sharpened senses, the very act itself was significant. There were other and blank pages in it for future years; and under different circumstances he might have laid it in its time-honoured place, on the great table in the library. . . .

It was not until some weeks later that Honora was seated one afternoon in the study waiting for him to come in, and sorting over some of the letters that they had not yet examined, when she came across a new lot thrust carelessly at the bottom of the older pile. She undid the elastic. Tucked away in one of the envelopes she was surprised to find a letter of recent date — October. She glanced at it, read involuntarily the first lines, and then, with a little cry, turned it over. It was from Cecil Grainger. She put it back into the envelope whence it came, and sat still.

After a while, she could not tell how long, she heard Hugh stamping the snow from his feet in the little entry beside the study. And in a few moments he entered, rubbing his hands and holding them out to the blaze.

"Hello, Honora," he said; "are you still at it? What's the matter — a hitch?"

She reached mechanically into the envelope, took out the letter, and handed it to him.

"I found it just now, Hugh. I didn't read much of it — I didn't mean to read any. It's from Mr. Grainger, and you must have overlooked it."

He took it.

"From Cecil?" he said, in an odd voice. "I wasn't aware that he had sent me anything — recently."

As he read, she felt the anger rise within him, she saw it in his eyes fixed upon the sheet, and the sense of fear, of irreparable loss, that had come over her as she had sat alone awaiting him, deepened. And yet, long expected verdicts are sometimes received in a spirit of recklessness. He finished the letter, and flung it in her lap.

"Read it," he said.

"Oh, Hugh!" she protested tremulously. "Perhaps — perhaps I'd better not." He laughed, and that frightened her the more. It was the laugh, she was sure, of the other man she had not known.

"I've always suspected that Cecil was a fool — now I'm sure of it. Read it!" he repeated, in a note of command that went oddly with his next sentence; "You will find that it is only ridiculous."

This assurance of the comedy it contained, however, did not serve to fortify her misgivings. It was written from a club.

"DEAR HUGH: Herewith a few letters for the *magnum opus* which I have extracted from Aunt Agatha, Judge Gaines, and others, and to send you my humble congratulations. By George, my boy, you have dashed off with a prize, and no mistake. I've never made any secret, you know, of my admiration for Honora — I hope I may call her so now. And I just thought I'd tell you you could count on me for a friend at court. Not that I'm any use now, old boy. I'll have to be frank with you — I always was. Discreet silence, and all that sort of thing: as much as my head is worth to open my mouth. But I had an idea it would be an act of friendship to let you know how things stand. Let time and works speak, and Cecil will give the thing a push at the proper moment. I understand from one of the intellectual journals I read that you have gone in for simple life and scientific farming. A deuced canny move. And for the love of heaven, old man, keep it up for a while, anyhow. I know it's difficult, but keep it up. I speak as a friend.

"They received your letters all right, announcing your marriage. You always enjoyed a row — I wish you could have been on hand to see and hear this one. It was no place for a man of peace, and I spent two nights at the club. I've never made any secret, you know, of the fact that I think the Pendleton connection hide-bound. And you understand Bessie — there's no good of my explaining her. You'd have thought divorce a brand-new invention of the devil, instead of a comparatively old institution. And if you don't mind my saying so, my boy, you took this fence a bit on the run, the way you do everything.

The fact is, divorce is going out of fashion. Maybe it's because the Pendleton-Grenfell element have always set their patrician faces against it; maybe its been a bit overdone. Most people who have tried it have discovered that the fire is no better than the frying-pan — both hot as soon as they warm up. Of course, old boy, there's nothing personal in this. Sit tight, and stick to the simple life — that's your game as I see it. No news — I've never known things to be so quiet. Jerry won over two thousand night before last — he made it no trumps in his own hand four times running.

"Yours,

"CECIL."

Honora returned this somewhat unique epistle to her husband, and he crushed it. There was an ill-repressed, terrifying savagery in the act, and her heart was torn between fear and pity for this lone message of good-will. Whatever its wording, such it was. A dark red flush had mounted his forehead to the roots of his short, curly hair.

"Well?" he said.

She was fighting for her presence of mind. Flashes of his temper she had known, but she had never seen the cruel, fiendish thing — his anger. Not *his* anger, but the anger of the destroyer that she beheld waking now after its long sleep, and taking possession of him, and transforming him before her very eyes. She had been able to cope with the new man, but she felt numb and powerless before the resuscitated demon of the old.

"What do you expect me to say, Hugh?" she faltered, with a queer feeling that she was not addressing him.

"Anything you like," he replied. "Defend Cecil."

"Why should I defend him?" she said dully.

"Because you have no pride."

A few seconds elapsed before the full import and brutality of this insult reached her intelligence, and she cried out his name in a voice shrill with anguish. But he seemed to delight in the pain he had caused.

"You couldn't be expected, I suppose, to see that this letter is a d—d impertinence, filled with an outrageous flippancy, a deliberate affront, an implication that our marriage does not exist."

She sat stunned, knowing that the real pain would come later. That which slowly awoke in her now, as he paced the room, was a high sense of danger, and a persistent inability to regard the man who had insulted her as her husband. He was rather an enemy to them both, and he would overturn, if he could, the frail craft of their happiness in the storm. She cried out to Hugh as across the waters.

"No, — I have no pride, Hugh, — it is gone. I have thought of you only. The fear that I might separate you from your family, from your friends, and ruin your future has killed my pride. He — Mr. Grainger — meant to be kind. He is always like that — it's his way of saying things. He wishes to show that he is friendly to you — to me —"

"In spite of my relations," cried Chiltern, stopping in the middle of the room. "They cease to be my relations from this day. I disown them. I say it deliberately. So long as I live, not one of them shall come into this house. All my life they have begged me to settle down, to come up here and live the life my father did. Very well, now I've done it. And I wrote to them and told them that I intended to live henceforth like a gentleman and a decent citizen — more than some of them do. No, I wash my hands of them. If they were to crawl up here from the gate on their knees, I'd turn them out."

Although he could not hear her, she continued to plead.

"Hugh, try to think of how — how our marriage must have appeared to them. Not that I blame you for being angry. We only thought of one thing — our love —" her voice broke at the word, "and our own happiness. We did not consider others. It is that which sometimes has made me afraid, that we believed ourselves above the law. And now that we have — begun so well, don't spoil it, Hugh! Give them time, let them see by our works that we are in earnest, that we intend to live useful lives.

I don't mean to beg them," she cried, at sight of his eyes. "Oh, I don't mean that. I don't mean to entreat them, or even to communicate with them. But they are your flesh and blood — you must remember that. Let us prove that we are — not like the others," she said, lifting her head, "and then it cannot matter to us what any one thinks. We shall have justified our act to ourselves."

But he was striding up and down the room again. It was as she feared — her plea had fallen on unheeding ears. A sudden convulsive leaping of the inner fires sent him to his desk, and he seized some note-paper from the rack. Honora rose to her feet, and took a step towards him.

"Hugh — what are you going to do?"

"Do!" he cried, swinging in his chair and facing her, "I'm going to do what any man with an ounce of self-respect would do under the circumstances. I'm going to do what I was a fool not to have done three months ago — what I should have done if it hadn't been for you. If in their contemptible, pharisaical notions of morality they choose to forget what my mother and father were to them, they cease to exist for me. If it's the last act of my life I'm going to tell them so."

She stood gazing at him, but she was as one of whom he took no account. He turned to the desk and began to write with a deliberation all the more terrible to her because of the white anger he felt. And still she stood. He pressed the button on his desk, and Starling responded.

"I want a man from the stable to be ready to take some letters to town in half an hour," he said.

It was not until then that she turned and slowly left the room. A mortal sickness seemed to invade her vitals, and she went to her own chamber and flung herself, face downward, on the lace covering of the bed: and the sobs that shook her were the totterings of the foundations of her universe. For a while, in the intensity of her anguish, all thought was excluded. Presently, however, when the body was spent, the mind began to practise its subtle and intolerable torture, and she was invaded by a sense of loneliness colder than the space between the worlds.

Where was she to go, whither flee, now that his wrath was turned against her? On the strength of his love alone she had pinned her faith, discarded and scorned all other help. And at the first contact with that greater power which he had taught her so confidently to despise, that strength had broken!

Slowly, she gazed back over the path she had trod, where roses once had held up smiling heads. It was choked now by brambles that scratched her nakedness at every step. Ah, how easily she had been persuaded to enter it! "We have the right to happiness," he had said, and she had looked into his eyes and believed him. What was this strange, elusive happiness, that she had so pantingly pursued and never overtaken? that essence pure and unalloyed with baser things? Ecstasy, perhaps, she had found — or was it delirium? Fear was the boon companion of these; or better, the pestilence that stalked behind them, ever ready to strike.

Then, as though some one had turned on a light — a sickening, yet penetrating blue light — she looked at Hugh Chiltern. She did not wish to look, but that which had turned on the light and bade her was stronger than she. She beheld, as it were, the elements of his being, the very sources of the ceaseless, restless energy that was driving him on. And scan as she would, no traces of the vaunted illimitable power that is called love could she discern. Love he possessed; that she had not doubted, and did not doubt, even now. But it had been given her to see that these springs had existed before love had come, and would flow, perchance, after it had departed. Now she understood his anger; it was like the anger of a fiercely rushing river striving to break a dam and invade the lands below with devastating floods. All these months the waters had been mounting. . . .

Turning at length from the consideration of this figure, she asked herself whether, if with her present knowledge she had her choice to make over again, she would have chosen differently. The answer was a startling negative. She loved him. Incomprehensible, unreasonable, and un-reasoning sentiment! That she had received a wound, she knew; whether it were mortal, or whether it would heal and leave a scar, she could not say. One salient, awful fact she began gradually to realize, that if she sank back upon the pillows she was lost. Little it would profit her to save her body. She had no choice between her present precarious foothold and the abyss, and wounded as she was she would have to fight. There was no retreat.

She sat up, and presently got to her feet and went to the window and stared through the panes until she distinguished the blue whiteness of the fallen snow on her little balcony. The night, despite the clouds, had a certain luminous quality. Then she drew the curtains, searched for the switch, and flooded the room with a soft glow — that beautiful room in which he had so proudly installed her four months before. She smoothed the bed, and walking to the mirror gazed intently at her face, and then she bathed it. Afterwards she opened her window again, admitting a flurry of snow, and stood for some minutes breathing in the sharp air.

Three quarters of an hour later she was dressed and descending the stairs, and as she entered the library dinner was announced. Let us spare Honora the account of that repast, — or rather a recital of the conversation that accompanied it. What she found to say under the eyes of the servants is of little value, although the fact itself deserves to be commended as a high accomplishment; and while she talked, she studied the brooding mystery that he presented, and could make nothing of it. His mood was new. It was not sullenness, nor repressed rage; and his answers were brief, but he was not taciturn. It struck her that in spite of a concentration such as she had never in her life bestowed on any other subject, her knowledge of him — of the Chiltern she had married — was still wofully incomplete, and that in proportion to the lack of perfection of that knowledge her danger was great. Perhaps the Chiltern she had married was as yet in a formative state. Be this as it may, what she saw depicted on his face to-night corresponded to no former experience.

They went back to the library. Coffee was brought and carried off, and Honora was standing before the fire. Suddenly he rose from his chair, crossed the room, and before she could draw away seized and crushed her in his arms without a word. She lay there, inert, bewildered as in the grip of an unknown force, until presently she was aware of the beating of his heart, and a glimmering of what he felt came to her. Nor was it an understandable thing, except to the woman who loved him. And yet — and yet she feared it even in that instant of glory. . . . When at last she dared to look up, he kissed away the tears from her cheeks.

"I love you," he said. "You must never doubt it — do you understand?"

"Yes, Hugh."

"You must never doubt it," he repeated roughly.

His contrition was a strange thing — if it were contrition. And love — woman's love — is sometimes the counsellor of wisdom. Her sole reproach was to return his kiss.

Presently she chose a book, and he read to her.

CHAPTER XV

THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY

One morning, as he gathered up his mail, Chiltern left lying on the breakfast table a printed circular, an appeal from the trustees of the Grenoble Hospital. As Honora read it she remembered that this institution had been the favourite charity of his mother; and that Mrs. Chiltern, at her death, had bequeathed an endowment which at the time had been ample. But Grenoble having grown since then, the deficit for this year was something under two thousand dollars, and in a lower corner was a request that contributions be sent to Mrs. Israel Simpson.

With the circular in her hand, Honora went thoughtfully up the stairs to her sitting-room. The month was February, the day overcast and muggy, and she stood for a while apparently watching the holes made in the snow by the steady drip from the cap of the garden wall. What she really saw was the face of Mrs. Israel Simpson, a face that had haunted her these many months. For Mrs. Simpson had gradually grown, in Honora's mind, to typify the hardness of heart of Grenoble. With Grenoble obdurate, what would become of the larger ambitions of Hugh Chiltern?

Mrs. Simpson was indeed a redoubtable lady, whose virtue shone with a particular high brightness on the Sabbath. Her lamp was brimming with oil against the judgment day, and she was as one divinely appointed to be the chastener of the unrighteous. So, at least, Honora beheld her. Her attire was rich but not gaudy, and had the air of proclaiming the prosperity of Israel Simpson alone as its unimpeachable source: her nose was long, her lip slightly marked by a masculine and masterful emblem, and her eyes protruded in such a manner as to give the impression of watchfulness on all sides.

It was this watchfulness that our heroine grew to regard as a salient characteristic. It never slept — even during Mr. Stopford's sermons. She was aware of it when she entered the church, and she was sure that it escorted her as far as the carriage on her departure. It seemed to oppress the congregation. And Honora had an idea that if it could have been withdrawn, her cruel proscription would have ended. For at times she thought that she read in the eyes of some of those who made way for her, friendliness and even compassion.

It was but natural, perhaps, in the situation in which our heroine found herself, that she should have lost her sense of proportion to the extent of regarding this lady in the light of a remorseless dragon barring her only path to peace. And those who might have helped her — if any there were — feared the dragon as much as she. Mrs. Simpson undoubtedly would not have relished this characterization, and she is not to have the opportunity of presenting her side of the case. We are looking at it from Honora's view, and Honora beheld chimeras. The woman changed, for Honora, the very aspect of the house of God; it was she who appeared to preside there, or rather to rule by terror. And Honora, as she glanced at her during the lessons, often wondered if she realized the appalling extent of her cruelty. Was this woman, who begged so audibly to be delivered from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy, in reality a Christian? Honora hated her, and yet she prayed that God would soften her heart. Was there no way in which she could be propitiated, appeased? For the sake of the thing desired, and which it was given this woman to withhold, she was willing to humble herself in the dust.

Honora laid the hospital circular on the desk beside her account book. She had an ample allowance from Hugh; but lying in a New York bank was what remained of the unexpected legacy she had received from her father, and it was from this that she presently drew a cheque for five hundred dollars, — a little sacrifice that warmed her blood as she wrote. Not for the unfortunate in the hospital was she making it, but for him: and that she could do this from the little store that was her very own gave her a thrill of pride. She would never need it again. If he deserted her, it mattered little what became of her. If he deserted her!

She sat gazing out of the window over the snow, and a new question was in her heart. Was it as a husband that he loved her? Did their intercourse have that intangible quality of safety that belonged to married life? And was it not as a mistress rather than a wife that, in their isolation, she watched his moods so jealously? A mistress! Her lips parted, and she repeated the word aloud, for self-torture is human.

Her mind dwelt upon their intercourse. There were the days they spent together, and the evenings, working or reading. Ah, but had the time ever been when, in the depths of her being, she had felt the real security of a wife? When she had not always been dimly conscious of a desire to please him, of a struggle to keep him interested and contented? And there were the days when he rode alone, the nights when he read or wrote alone, when her joy was turned to misery; there were the alternating periods of passion and alienation. Alienation, perhaps, was too strong a word. Nevertheless, at such times, her feeling was one of desolation.

His heart, she knew, was bent upon success at Grenoble, and one of the books which they had recently read together was a masterly treatise, by an Englishman, on the life-work of an American statesman. The vast width of the country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, was stirred with politics: a better era was coming, the pulse of the nation beating with renewed life; a stronger generation was arising to take the Republic into its own hands. A campaign was in progress in the State, and twice her husband had gone some distance to hear the man who embodied the new ideas, and had come back moody and restless, like a warrior condemned to step aside. Suppose his hopes were blighted — what would happen? Would the spirit of reckless adventure seize him again? Would the wilds call him? or the city? She did not dare to think.

It was not until two mornings later that Hugh tossed her across the breakfast table a pink envelope with a wide flap and rough edges. Its sender had taken advantage of the law that permits one-cent stamps for local use.

"Who's your friend, Honora?" he asked.

She tried to look calmly at the envelope that contained her fate.

"It's probably a dressmaker's advertisement," she answered, and went on with the pretence of eating her breakfast.

"Or an invitation to dine with Mrs. Simpson," he suggested, laughingly, as he rose. "It's just the stationery she would choose."

Honora dropped her spoon in her egg-cup. It instantly became evident, however, that his remark was casual and not serious, for he gathered up his mail and departed. Her hand trembled a little as she opened the letter, and for a moment the large gold monogram of its sender danced before her eyes.

"*Dear Madam, Permit me to thank you in the name of the Trustees of the Grenoble Hospital for your generous contribution, and believe me, Sincerely yours,*

"MARIA W. SIMPSON."

The sheet fluttered to the floor.

When Sunday came, for the first time her courage failed her. She had heard the wind complaining in the night, and the day dawned wild and wet. She got so far as to put on a hat and veil and waterproof coat; Starling had opened the doors, and through the frame of the doorway, on the wet steps, she saw the footman in his long mackintosh, his umbrella raised to escort her to the carriage. Then she halted, irresolute. The impassive old butler stood on the sill, a silent witness, she knew, to the struggle going on within her. It seemed ridiculous indeed to play out the comedy with him, who could have recited the lines. And yet she turned to him.

"Starling, you may send the coachman back to the stable."

"Very good, madam."

As she climbed the stairs she saw him gravely closing the doors. She paused on the landing, her sense of relief overborne by a greater sense of defeat. There was still time! She heard the wheels of the carriage on the circle—yet she listened to them die away. Starling softly caught the latch, and glanced up. For an instant their looks crossed, and she hurried on with palpitating breast, reached her boudoir, and closed the door. The walls seemed to frown on her, and she remembered that the sitting-room in St. Louis had worn that same look when, as a child, she had feigned illness in order to miss a day at school. With a leaden heart she gazed out on the waste of melting snow, and then tried in vain to read a novel that a review had declared amusing. But a question always came between her and the pages: was this the turning point of that silent but terrible struggle, when she must acknowledge to herself that the world had been too strong for her? After a while her loneliness became unbearable. Chiltern was in the library.

"Home from church?" he inquired.

"I didn't go, Hugh."

He looked up in surprise.

"Why, I thought I saw you start," he said.

"It's such a dreary day, Hugh."

"But that has never prevented you before."

"Don't you think I'm entitled to one holiday?" she asked.

But it was by a supreme effort she kept back the tears. He looked at her attentively, and got up suddenly and put his hands upon her shoulders. She could not meet his eyes, and trembled under his touch.

"Honora," he said, "why don't you tell me the truth?"

"What do you mean, Hugh?"

"I have been wondering how long you'd stand it. I mean that these women, who call themselves Christians, have been brutal to you. They haven't so much as spoken to you in church, and not one of them has been to this house to call. Isn't that so?"

"Don't let us judge them yet, Hugh," she begged, a little wildly, feeling again the gathering of another destroying storm in him that might now sweep the last vestige of hope away. And she seized the arguments as they came. "Some of them may be prejudiced, I know. But others — others I am sure are kind, and they have had no reason to believe I should like to know them — to work among them. I — I could not go to see them first, I am glad to wait patiently until some accident brings me near them. And remember, Hugh, the atmosphere in which we both lived before we came here — an atmosphere they regard as frivolous and pleasure-loving. People who are accustomed to it are not usually supposed to care to make friends in a village, or to bother their heads about the improvement of a community. Society is not what it was in your mother's day, who knew these people or their mothers, and took an interest in what they were doing. Perhaps they think me — haughty." She tried to smile. "I have never had an opportunity to show them that I am not."

She paused, breathless, and saw that he was unconvinced.

"Do you believe that, Honora?" he demanded.

"I — I want to believe it. And I am sure, that if it is not true now, it will become so, if we only wait."

He shook his head.

"Never," he said, and dropped his hands and walked over to the fire. She stood where he had left her.

"I understand," she heard him say, "I understand that you sent Mrs. Simpson five hundred dollars for the hospital. Simpson told me so yesterday, at the bank."

"I had a little money of my own — from my father — and I was glad to do it, Hugh. That was your mother's charity."

Her self-control was taxed to the utmost by the fact that he was moved. She could not see his face, but his voice betrayed it.

"And Mrs. Simpson?" he asked, after a moment.

"Mrs. Simpson?"

"She thanked you?"

"She acknowledged the cheque, as president. I was not giving it to her, but to the hospital."

"Let me see the letter."

"I — I have destroyed it."

He brought his hands together forcibly, and swung about and faced her.

"Damn them!" he cried, "from this day I forbid you to have anything to do with them, do you hear. I forbid you! They're a set of confounded, self-righteous hypocrites. Give them time! In all conscience they have had time enough, and opportunity enough to know what our intentions are. How long do they expect us to fawn at their feet for a word of recognition? What have we done that we should be outlawed in this way by the very people who may thank my family for their prosperity? Where would Israel Simpson be to-day if my father had not set him up in business? Without knowing anything of our lives they pretend to sit in judgment on us. Why? Because you have been divorced, and I married you. I'll make them pay for this!"

"No!" she begged, taking a step towards him. "You don't know what you're saying, Hugh. I implore you not to do anything. Wait a little while! Oh, it is worth trying!" So far the effort carried her, and no farther. Perhaps, at sight of the relentlessness in his eyes, hope left her, and she sank down on a chair and buried her face in her hands, her voice broken by sobs. "It is my fault, and I am justly punished. I have no right to you — I was wicked, I was selfish to marry you. I have ruined your life."

He went to her, and lifted her up, but she was like a child whom passionate weeping has carried beyond the reach of words. He could say nothing to console her, plead as he might, assume the blame, and swear eternal fealty. One fearful, supreme fact possessed her, the wreck of Chiltern breaking against the rocks, driven there by her. . . .

That she eventually grew calm again deserves to be set down as a tribute to the organism of the human body.

That she was able to breathe, to move, to talk, to go through the pretence of eating, was to her in the nature of a mild surprise. Life went on, but it seemed to Honora in the hours following this scene that it was life only. Of the ability to feel she was utterly bereft. Her calmness must have been appalling: her own indifference to what might happen now, — if she could have realized it,— even more so. And in the afternoon, wandering about the house, she found herself in the conservatory. It had been built on against the library, and sometimes, on stormy afternoons, she had tea there with Hugh in the red-cushioned chairs beside the trickling fountain, the flowers giving them an illusion of summer.

Under ordinary circumstances the sound of wheels on the gravel would have aroused her, for Hugh scarcely ever drove. And it was not until she glanced through the open doors into the library that she knew that a visitor had come to Highlawns. He stood beside the rack for the magazines and reviews, somewhat nervously fingering a heavy watch charm, his large silk hat bottom upward on the chair behind him. It was Mr. Israel Simpson. She could see him plainly, and she was by no means hidden from him by the leaves, and yet she did not move. He had come to see Hugh, she understood; and she was probably going to stay where she was and listen. It seemed of no use repeating to herself that this conversation would be of vital importance; for the mechanism that formerly had recorded these alarms and spread them, refused to work. She saw Chiltern enter, and she read on his face that he meant to destroy. It was no news to her. She had known it for a long, long time — in fact, ever since she had come to Grenoble. Her curiosity, strangely enough — or so it seemed afterwards— was centred on Mr. Simpson, as though he were an actor she had been very curious to see.

It was this man, and not her husband, whom she perceived from the first was master of the situation. His geniality was that of the commander of an overwhelming besieging force who could afford to be generous. She seemed to discern the cloudy ranks of the legions behind him, and they encircled the world. He was aware of these legions, and their presence completely annihilated the ancient habit of subserviency with which in former years he had been wont to enter this room and listen to the instructions of that formidable old lion, the General: so much was plain from the orchestra. He went forward with a cheerful, if ponderous bonhomie.

"Ah, Hugh," said he, "I got your message just in time. I was on the point of going over to see old Murdock. Seriously ill — you know — last time, I'm afraid," and Mr. Simpson shook his head. He held out his hand. Hugh did not appear to notice it.

"Sit down, Mr. Simpson," he said.

Mr. Simpson sat down. Chiltern took a stand before him.

"You asked me the other day whether I would take a certain amount of the stock and bonds of the Grenoble Light and Power Company, in which you are interested, and which is, I believe, to supply the town with electric light, the present source being inadequate."

"So I did," replied Mr. Simpson, urbanely, "and I believe the investment to be a good one. There is no better power in this part of the country than Psalter's Falls."

"I wished to inform you that I do not intend to go into the Light and Power Company," said Chiltern.

"I am sorry to hear it," Mr. Simpson declared. "In my opinion, if you searched the state for a more profitable or safer thing, you could not find it."

"I have no doubt the investment is all that could be desired, Mr. Simpson. I merely wished you to know, as soon as possible, that I did not intend to put my money into it. There are one or two other little matters which you have mentioned during the week. You pointed out that it would be an advantage to Grenoble to revive the county fair, and you asked me to subscribe five thousand dollars to the Fair Association."

This time Mr. Simpson remained silent.

"I have come to the conclusion, to-day, not to subscribe a cent. I also intend to notify the church treasurer that

I will not any longer rent a pew, or take any further interest in the affairs of St. John's church. My wife was kind enough, I believe, to send five hundred dollars to the Grenoble hospital. That will be the last subscription from any member of my family. I will resign as a director of the Grenoble Bank to-morrow, and my stock will be put on the market. And finally I wished to tell you that henceforth I do not mean to aid in any way any enterprise in Grenoble."

During this announcement, which had been made with an ominous calmness, Mr. Simpson had gazed steadily at the brass andirons. He cleared his throat.

"My dear Hugh," said he, "what you have said pains me excessively — excessively. I — ahem — fail to grasp it. As an old friend of your family — of your father — I take the liberty of begging you to reconsider your words."

Chiltern's eyes blazed.

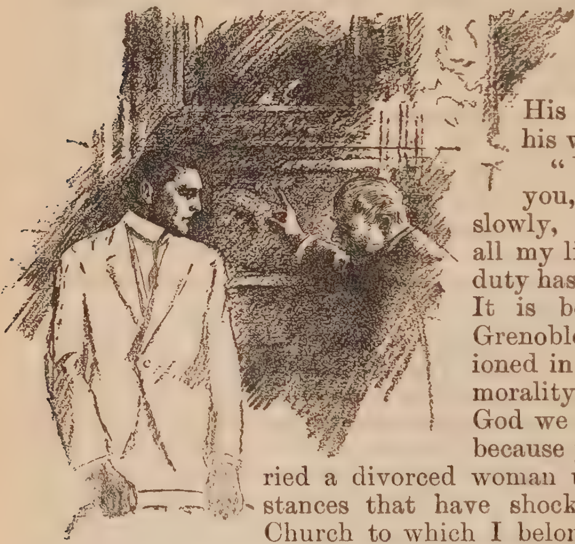
"Since you have mentioned my father, Mr. Simpson," he exclaimed, "I may remind you that his son might reasonably have expected at your hands a different treatment than that you have accorded him. You have asked me to reconsider my decision, but I notice that you have failed to inquire into my reasons for making it. I came back here to Grenoble with every intention of devoting the best efforts of my life in aiding to build up the community, as my father had done. It was natural, perhaps, that I should expect a little tolerance, a little friendliness, a little recognition in return. My wife was prepared to help me. We did not ask much. But you have treated us like outcasts. Neither you nor Mrs. Simpson, from whom in all conscience I looked for consideration and friendship, have as much as spoken to Mrs. Chiltern in church. You have made it clear that, while you are willing to accept our contributions, you cared to have nothing to do with us whatever. If I have overstated the case, please correct me."

Mr. Simpson rose protestingly.

"My dear Hugh," he said. "This is very painful. I beg that you will spare me."

"My name is Chiltern," answered Hugh, shortly. "Will you kindly explain, if you can, why the town of Grenoble has ignored us?"

Israel Simpson hesitated a moment. He seemed older when he looked at Chiltern again, and in his face commiseration and indignation were oddly intermingled. His hand sought his watch chain.



"Yes, I will tell you," he replied slowly, "although in all my life no crueller duty has fallen on me. It is because we in Grenoble are old-fashioned in our views of morality, and I thank God we are so. It is because you have married a divorced woman under circumstances that have shocked us. The Church to which I belong, and whose teachings I respect, does not recognize such a marriage. And you have, in my opinion, committed an offence against society. To recognize you by social intercourse would be to condone that offence, to open the door to practices that would lead, in a short time, to the decay of our people."

Israel Simpson turned, and pointed a shaking forefinger at the portrait of General Angus Chiltern.

"And I affirm here, fearlessly before you, that he, your father, would have been the last to recognize such a marriage."

Chiltern took a step forward, and his fingers tightened.

"You will oblige me by leaving my father's name out of this discussion," he said.

But Israel Simpson did not recoil.

"If we learn anything by example in this world, Mr. Chiltern," he continued, "and it is my notion that we do, I am indebted to your father for more than my start in life. Through many years of intercourse with him, and contemplation of his character, I have gained more than riches. You have forced me to say this thing. I am sorry if I have pained you. But I should not be true to the principles to which he himself was consistent in life, and which he taught by example so many others, if I ventured to hope that social recognition in Grenoble would be accorded you, or to aid in any way such recognition. As long as I live I will oppose it. There are, apparently, larger places in the world and less humble people who will be glad to receive you. I can only hope, as an old friend and well-wisher of your family, that you may find happiness."

Israel Simpson fumbled for his hat, picked it up, and left the room. For a moment Chiltern stood like a man turned to stone, and then he pressed the button on the wall behind him.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH A MIRROR IS HELD UP

SPRING came to Highlawns, Eden tinted with myriad tender greens. Yellow-greens, like the beech boughs over the old wall, and gentle blue-greens, like the turf; and the waters of the lake were blue and white in imitation of the cloud-flecked sky. It seemed to Honora, as she sat on the garden bench, that the yellow and crimson tulips could not open wide enough their cups to the sun.

In these days she looked at her idol, and for the first time believed it to be within her finite powers to measure him. She began by asking herself if it were really she who had ruined his life, and whether he would ultimately have redeemed himself if he had married a woman whom the world would have recognized. Thus did the first doubt invade her heart. It was of him she was thinking still, and always. But there was the doubt. If he could have stood this supreme test of isolation, of the world's laughter and scorn, although it would have made her own heavy burden of responsibility heavier, yet could she still have rejoiced. That he should crumble was the greatest of her punishments.

Was he crumbling? In these months she could not quite be sure, and she tried to shut her eyes when the little pieces fell off, to remind herself that she must make allowances for the severity of his disappointment. Spring was here, the spring to which he had so eagerly looked forward, and yet the listlessness with which he went about his work was apparent. Sometimes he did not appear at breakfast, although Honora clung with desperation to the hour they had originally fixed: sometimes Mr. Manning waited for him until nearly ten o'clock, only to receive a curt dismissal. He went off for long rides, alone, and to the despair of the groom brought back the horses in a lather, with drooping heads and heaving sides; one of them he ruined. He declared there wasn't a horse in the stable fit to give him exercise.

Often he sat for hours in his study, brooding, inaccessible. She had the tennis-court rolled and marked, but the contests here were pitifully unequal; for the row of silver cups on his mantel, engraved with many dates, bore witness to his athletic prowess. She wrote for a book on solitaire, but after a while the sight of cards became distasteful. With a secret diligence she read the reviews, and sent for novels and memoirs which she scanned eagerly before they were begun with him. Once, when she went into his study on an errand, she stood for a minute gazing painfully at the cleared space on his desk where once had lain the papers and letters relative to the life of General Angus Chiltern.

There were intervals in which her hope flared, in which she tasted, fearfully and with bated breath, something that she had not thought to know again. It was characteristic of him that his penitence was never spoken: nor did he exhibit penitence. He seemed rather at such times merely to become normally himself, as one who changes personality, apparently oblivious to the moods and deeds of yesterday. And these occasions added perplexity to her troubles. She could not reproach him — which perhaps in any event she would have been too wise to do; but she could not, try as she would, bring herself to the point of a discussion of their situation. The risk, she felt, was too great; now, at least. There were instances that made her hope that the hour might come.

One fragrant morning Honora came down to find him awaiting her, and to perceive lying on her napkin certain distilled drops of the spring sunshine. In language less poetic, diamonds to be worn in the ears. The wheel of fashion, it appeared, had made a complete revolution since the early days of his mother's marriage. She gave a little exclamation, and her hand went to her heart.

"They are Brazilian stones," he explained, with a boyish pleasure that awoke memories and held her speechless. "I believe it's very difficult, if not impossible, to buy them now. My father got them after the war, and I had them remounted." And he pressed them against the pink lobes of her ears. "You look like the Queen of Sheba."

"How do you know?" she asked tremulously. "You never saw her."

"According to competent judges," he replied, "she was the most beautiful woman of her time. Go upstairs and put them on."

She shook her head. An inspiration had come to her.

"Wait," she cried. And that morning, when Hugh had gone out, she sent for Starling and startled him by commanding that the famous Lowestoft set be used at dinner. He stared at her, and the corners of his mouth twitched, and still he stood respectfully in the doorway.

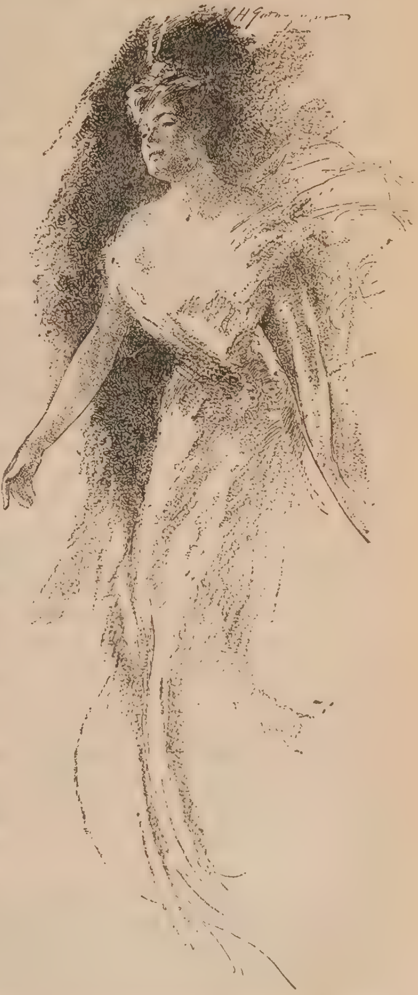
"That is all, Starling."

"I beg pardon, madam. How—how many will there be at the table?"

"Just Mr. Chiltern and I," she replied. But she did not look at him.

It was superstition, undoubtedly. She was well aware that Starling had not believed that the set would be used again. An extraordinary order, that might well have sent him away wondering; for the Lowestoft had been reserved for occasions. Ah, but this was to be an occasion, a festival! The whimsical fancy grew in her mind as the day progressed, and she longed with an unaccustomed impatience for nightfall, and anticipation had a strange taste. Mathilde, with the sympathetic gift of her nation, shared the excitement of her mistress in this fête. The curtains in the pink bedroom were drawn, and on the bed, in all its splendour of lace and roses, was spread out the dinner-gown—a chef-d'œuvre of Madame Barrière's as yet unworn. And no vulgar, worldly triumph was it to adorn.

Her heart was beating fast as she descended the stairway, bright spots of colour flaming in her cheeks and the diamonds sparkling in her ears. A prima donna might have guessed her feelings as she paused, a little breathless, on the wide landing under the windows. She heard a footstep. Hugh came out of the library and stood motionless, looking up at her. But even those who have felt the silence and the stir that prefaces the clamorous applause of the thousands could not know the thrill that swept her under his tribute. She came down the last flight of steps, slowly, and stopped in front of him.



"You are wonderful, Honora!" he said, and his voice was not quite under control. He took her hand, that trembled in his, and he seemed to be seeking to express something for which he could find no words. Thus may the King have looked upon Rosamond in her bower; upon a beauty created for the adornment of courts which he had sequestered for his eyes alone.

Honora, as though merely by the touch of his hand in hers, divined his thought.

"If you think me so, dear," she whispered happily, "it's all I ask."

And they went in to dinner as to a ceremony. It was indeed a ceremony filled for her with some occult, sacred meaning that she could not put into words. A feast symbolical. Starling was sent to the wine-cellar to bring back a cobwebbed Madeira near a century old, brought out on rare occasions in the family. And Hugh, when his glass was filled, looked at his wife and raised it in silence to his lips.

She never forgot the scene. The red glow of light from the shaded candles on the table, and the corners of the dining room filled with gloom. The old butler, like a high priest, standing behind his master's chair. The long windows, with the curtains drawn in the deep, panelled arches; the carved white mantelpiece ; the glint of silver on the sideboard, with its wine-cooler underneath, — these spoke of generations of respectability and achievement. Would this absorbed isolation, this marvellous wild love of theirs, be the end of it all ? Honora, as one detached, as a ghost in the corner, saw herself in the picture with startling clearness. When she looked up, she met her husband's eyes. Always she met them, and in them a questioning, almost startled look that was new.

"Is it the earrings ? " she asked at last.

"I don't know," he answered. "I can't tell. They seem to have changed you, but perhaps they have brought out something in your face and eyes I have never seen before."

"And — you like it, Hugh ? "

"Yes, I like it," he replied, and added enigmatically, "but I don't understand it."

She was silent, and oddly satisfied, trusting to fate to send more mysteries.

Two days had not passed when that restlessness for which she watched so narrowly revived. He wandered aimlessly about the place, and flared up into such a sudden violent temper at one of the helpers in the fields that the man ran as for his life, and refused to set foot again on any of the Chiltern farms. In the afternoon he sent for

Honora to ride with him, and scolded her for keeping him waiting. And he wore a spur, and pressed his horse so savagely that she cried out in remonstrance, although at such times she had grown to fear him.

"Oh, Hugh, how can you be so cruel!"

"The beast has no spirit," he said shortly. "I'll get one that has."

Their road wound through the western side of the estate towards misty rolling country, in the folds of which lay countless lakes, and at length they caught sight of an unpainted farm-house set amidst a white cloud of apple trees in bloom. On the doorstep, whittling, sat a bearded, unkempt farmer with a huge frame. In answer to Hugh's question he admitted that he had a horse for sale, stuck his knife in the step, rose, and went off towards the barn near by; and presently reappeared, leading by a halter a magnificent black. The animal stood jerking his head, blowing and pawing the ground while Chiltern examined him.

"He's been ridden?" he asked.

The man nodded.

Chiltern sprang to the ground and began to undo his saddle girths. A sudden fear seized Honora.

"Oh, Hugh, you're not going to ride him!" she exclaimed.

"Why not? How else am I going to find out anything about him?"

"He looks — dangerous," she faltered.

"I'm tired of horses that haven't any life in them," he said, as he lifted off the saddle.

"I guess we'd better get him in the barn," said the farmer.

Honora went behind them to witness the operation, which was not devoid of excitement. The great beast plunged savagely when they tightened the girths, and closed his teeth obstinately against the bit; but the farmer held firmly to his nose and shut off his wind. They led him out from the barn floor.

"Your name Chiltern?" asked the farmer.

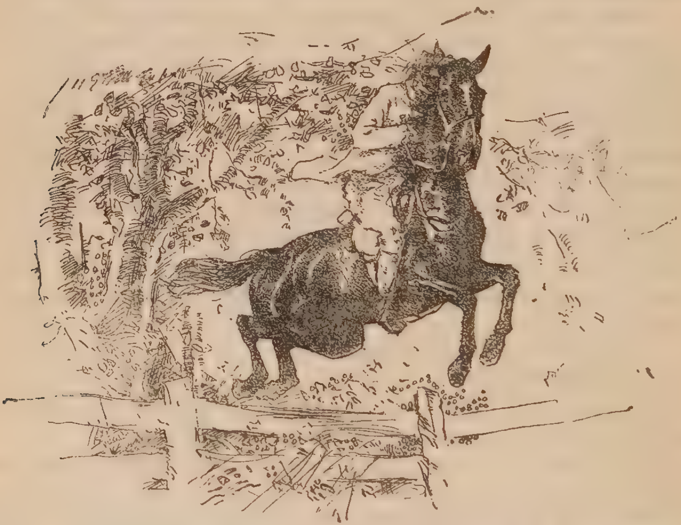
"Yes," said Hugh, curtly.

"Thought so," said the farmer, and he held the horse's head.

Honora had a feeling of faintness.

"Hugh, do be careful!" she pleaded.

He paid no heed to her. His eyes, she noticed, had a certain feverish glitter of animation, of impatience, such as men of his type must wear when they go into battle. He seized the horse's mane, he put his foot in the stirrup; the astonished animal gave a snort and jerked the bridle from the farmer's hand. But Chiltern was in the saddle, with knees pressed tight.



There ensued a struggle that Honora will never forget. And although she never again saw that farm-house, its details and surroundings come back to her in vivid colours when she closes her eyes. The great horse in every conceivable pose, with veins standing out and knotty muscles twisting in his legs and neck and thighs. Once, when he dashed into the apple trees, she gave a cry; a branch snapped, and Chiltern emerged, still seated, with his hat gone and the blood trickling from a scratch on his forehead. She saw him strike with his spurs, and in a twinkling horse and rider had passed over the dilapidated remains of a fence and were flying down the hard clay road, disappearing into a dip. A reverberating sound, like a single stroke, told them that the bridge at the bottom had been crossed.

In an agony of terror, Honora followed, her head on fire, her heart pounding faster than the hoof beats. But the animal she rode, though a good one, was no match for the great infuriated beast which she pursued. Presently she came to a wooded corner where the road forked thrice, and beyond, — not without difficulty, — brought her sweating mare to a stand. The quality of her fear changed from wild terror to cold dread. A hermit thrush, in the wood near by, broke the silence with a song inconceivably sweet. At last she went back to the farm-house, hoping against hope that Hugh might have returned by another road. But he was not there. The farmer was still nonchalantly whittling.

"Oh, how could you let any one get on a horse like that?" she cried.

"You're his wife, ain't you?" he asked.

Something in the man's manner seemed to compel her to answer, in spite of the form of the question.

"I am Mrs. Chiltern," she said.

He was looking at her with an expression that she found incomprehensible. His glance was penetrating, yet here again she seemed to read compassion. He continued to gaze at her, and presently, when he spoke, it was as though he were not addressing her at all.

"You put me in mind of a young girl I used to know," he said; "seems like a long time ago. You're pretty, and you're young, and ye didn't know what you were doin,' I'll warrant. Lost your head. He has a way of gittin' 'em — always had."

Honora did not answer. She would have liked to have gone away, but that which was stronger than her held her.

"She didn't live here," he explained, waving his hand deprecatingly towards the weather-beaten house. "We lived over near Morrisville in them days. And he don't remember me, your husband don't. I ain't surprised. I've got considerable older."

Honora was trembling from head to foot, and her hands were cold.

"I've got her picture in there, if ye'd like to look at it," he said, after a while.

"Oh, no!" she cried. "Oh, no!"

"Well, I don't know as I blame you." He sat down again and began to whittle. "Funny thing, chance," he remarked; "who'd a thought I should have owned that there hoss, and *he* should have come around here to ride it?"

She tried to speak, but she could not. The hideous imperturbability of the man's hatred sickened her. And her husband! The chips fell in silence until a noise on the road caused them to look up. Chiltern was coming back. She glanced again at the farmer, but his face was equally incapable, or equally unwilling, to express regret. Chiltern rode into the dooryard. The blood from the scratch on his forehead had crossed his temple and run in a jagged line down his cheek, his very hair (as she had sometimes seen it) was damp with perspiration, — blacker, kinkier; his eyes hard, reckless, bloodshot. So, in the past, must he have emerged from dozens of such wilful, brutal contests with man and beast. He had beaten the sweat-stained horse (temporarily — such was the impression Honora received), but she knew that he would like to have killed it for its opposition.

"Give me my hat, will you?" he cried to the farmer.

To her surprise the man obeyed. Chiltern leaped to the ground.

"What do you want for him?" he demanded.

"I'll take five hundred dollars."

"Bring him over in the morning," said Chiltern, curtly. . . .

They rode homeward in silence. Honora had not been able to raise her voice against the purchase, and she seemed powerless now to warn her husband of the man's enmity. She was thinking, rather, of the horror of the tragedy written on the farmer's face, to which he had given her the key: Hugh Chiltern, to whom she had intrusted her life and granted her all, had done this thing, ruthlessly, even as he had satisfied to-day his unbridled cravings in maltreating a horse! And she thought of that other woman, on whose picture she had refused to look. What was the essential difference between that woman and herself? He had wanted them both, he had taken them both for his pleasure, heedless of the pain he might cause to others and to them. For her, perhaps, the higher organism, had been reserved the higher torture. She did not know. The vision of the girl in the outer darkness reserved for castaways was terrible.

Up to this point she had, as it were, been looking into one mirror. Now another was suddenly raised behind her, and by its aid she beheld not a single, but countless, images of herself endlessly repeated. How many others besides this girl had there been? The question gave her the shudder of the contemplation of eternity. It was not the first time Honora had thought of his past, but until to-day it had lacked reality; until to-day she had clung to the belief that he had been misunderstood; until to-day she had considered those acts of his of the existence of which she was collectively aware under the generic term of wild oats. He had had too much money, and none had known how to control him. Now, through this concrete example of another's experience, she was given to understand that which she had strangely been unable to learn from her own. And she had fancied, in her folly, that she could control him! Unable as yet to grasp the full extent of her calamity, she rode on by his side, until she was aware at last that they had reached the door of the house at Highlawns.

"You look pale," he said as he lifted her off her horse. The demon in him, she perceived, was tired.

"Do I?"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing," she answered.

He laughed.

"It's confoundedly silly to get frightened that way," he declared. "The beast only wants riding."

Three mornings later she was seated in the garden with a frame of fancy work. Sometimes she put it down. The weather was overcast, languorous, and there was a feeling of rain in the air. Chiltern came in through the gate, and looked at her.

"I'm going to New York on the noon train," he said.

"To New York?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"There's no reason why you shouldn't if you wish to," she replied, picking up her frame.

"Anything I can get you?" he asked.

"No, thank you."

"You've been in such a deuced queer mood the last few days I can't make you out, Honora."

"You ought to have learned something about women by this time," she said.

"It seems to me," he announced, "that we need a little livening up."

CHAPTER XVII

THE RENEWAL OF AN ANCIENT HOSPITALITY

THERE were six letters from him, written from a club, representing the seven days of his absence. He made no secret of the fact that his visit to the metropolis was in the nature of a relaxation and a change of scene, but the letters themselves contained surprisingly little information as to how he was employing his holiday. He had encountered many old friends, supposedly all of the male sex: among them — most welcome of surprises to him! — Mr. George Pembroke, a boon companion at Harvard. And this mention of boon companionship brought up to Honora a sufficiently vivid idea of Mr. Pembroke's characteristics. The extent of her knowledge of this gentleman consisted in the facts that he was a bachelor, a member of a prominent Philadelphia family, and that time hung heavy on his hands.

One morning she received a telegram to the effect that her husband would be home that night, bringing three people with him. He sent his love, but neglected to state the names and sexes of the prospective guests. And she was still in a quandary as to what arrangements to make when Starling appeared in answer to her ring.

"You will send the omnibus to the five o'clock train," she said. "There will be three extra places at dinner, and tea when Mr. Chiltern arrives."

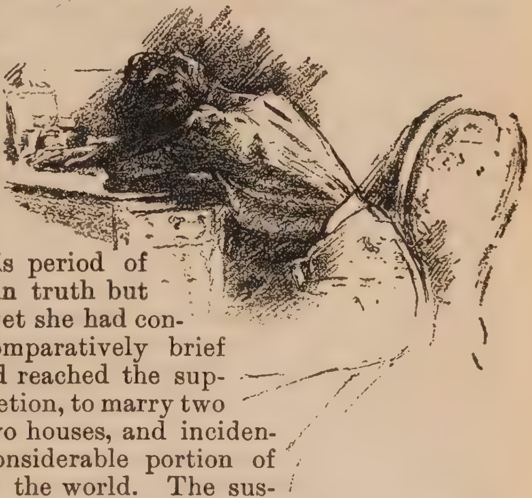
Although she strove to speak indifferently, she was sure from the way the old man looked at her that her voice had not been quite steady. Of late her curious feeling about him had increased in intensity; and many times, during this week she had spent alone, she had thought that his eyes had followed her with sympathy. She did not resent this. Her world having now contracted to that wide house, there was a comfort in knowing that there was one in it to whom she could turn in need. For she felt that she could turn to Starling; he alone, apparently, had measured the full depth of her trouble; nay, had silently predicted it from the beginning. And to-day, as he stood before her, she had an almost irresistible impulse to speak. Just a word — a human word would have been such a help to her! And how ridiculous the social law that kept the old man standing there, impassive, respectful, when this existed between them! Her tragedy was his tragedy; not in the same proportion, perhaps; nevertheless, he had the air of one who would die of it.

And she? Would she die? What would become of her? When she thought of the long days and months and years that stretched ahead of her, she felt that her soul would not be able to survive the process of steady degradation to which it was sure to be subjected. For she was a prisoner: the uttermost parts of the earth offered no refuge. To-day, she knew, was to see the formal inauguration of that process. She had known torture, but it had been swift, obliterating, excruciating. And hereafter it was to be slow, one turn at a time of the screws, squeezing by infinitesimal degrees the life out of her soul. And in the end — most fearful thought of all — in the end, painless. Painless! She buried her head in her arms on the little desk, shaken by sobs. . . .

How she fought that day to compose herself, fought and prayed! Prayed wildly to a God whose help, nevertheless, she felt she had forfeited, who was visiting her with just anger. At half-past four she heard the carriage on the far driveway, going to the station, and she went down and walked across the lawn to the pond, and around it; anything to keep moving. She hurried back to the house just in time to reach the hall as the omnibus backed up. And the first person she saw descend, after Hugh, was Mrs. Kame.

"Here we are, Honora," she cried. "I hope you're glad to see us, and that you'll forgive our coming so informally. You must blame Hugh. We've brought Adèle."

The second lady was, indeed, none other than Mrs. Eustace Rindge, formerly Mrs. Dicky Farnham. And she is worth — even at this belated stage in our chronicle — an attempted sketch, or at least an attempted impression. She was fair, and slim as a schoolgirl; not very tall, not exactly petite; at first sight she might have been taken for a particularly immature débutante, and her dress was youthful and rather mannish. Her years, at this period of her career, were in truth but two and twenty, yet she had contrived, in the comparatively brief time since she had reached the supposed age of discretion, to marry two men and build two houses, and incidentally to see a considerable portion of what is known as the world. The suspicion that she was not as innocent as a dove came to one, on closer inspection, as a shock: her eyes were tired, though not from loss of sleep; and her manner — how shall it be described to those whose happy lot in life has never been to have made the acquaintance of Mrs. Rindge's humbler sisters who have acquired — more coarsely, it is true — the same camaraderie? She was one of those for whom, seemingly, sex does not exist. Her air of good-fellowship with men was eloquent of a precise knowledge of what she might expect from them, and she was prepared to do her own policing, — not from any deep moral convictions. She belonged, logically, to that world which is disposed to take the law into its own hands, and she was the possessor of five millions of dollars.



"I came along," she said to Honora, as she gave her hand-bag to a footman. "I hope you don't mind. Abby and I were shopping and we ran into Hugh and Georgie yesterday at Sherry's, and we've been together ever since. Not quite that — but almost. Hugh begged us to come up, and there didn't seem to be any reason why we shouldn't, so we telephoned down to Banbury for our trunks and maids, and we've played bridge all the way. By the way, Georgie, where's my pocket-book?"

Mr. Pembroke handed it over, and was introduced by Hugh. He looked at Honora, and his glance somehow betokened that he was in the habit of looking only once. He had apparently made up his mind about her before he saw her. But he looked again, evidently finding her at variance with a preconceived idea, and this time she flushed a little under his stare, and she got the impression that Mr. Pembroke was a man from whom few secrets of a certain kind were hid. She felt that he had seized, at a second glance, a situation that she had succeeded in hiding from the women. He was surprised, but cynically so. He was the sort of person who had probably possessed at Harvard the knowledge of the world of a Tammany politician; he had long ago written his book — such as it was — and closed it: or, rather, he had worked out his system at a precocious age, and it had lasted him ever since. He had decided that undergraduate life, freed from undergraduate restrictions, was a good thing. And he did not, even in these days, object to breaking something valuable occasionally.

His physical attributes are more difficult to describe, so closely were they allied to those which, for want of a better word, must be called mental. He was neither tall nor short, he was well fed, but hard, his shoulders too broad, his head a little large. If he should have happened to bump against one, the result would have been a bruise — not for him. His eyes were blue, his light hair short, and there was a slight baldness beginning; his face was red-tanned. There was not the slightest doubt that he could be effectively rude, and often was; but it was evident, for some reason, that he meant to be gracious (for Mr. Pembroke) to Honora. Perhaps this was the result of the second glance. One of his name had not lacked, indeed, for instructions in gentility. It must not be thought that she was in a condition to care much about what Mr. Pembroke thought or did, and yet she felt instinctively that he had changed his greeting between that first and second glance.

"I hope you'll forgive my coming in this way," he said. "I'm an old friend of Hugh's."

"I'm very glad to have Hugh's friends," she answered.

He looked at her again.

"Is tea ready?" inquired Mrs. Kame. "I'm famished." And, as they walked through the house to the garden, where the table was set beside the stone seat: "I don't see how you ever can leave this place, Honora. I've always wanted to come here, but it's even more beautiful than I thought."

"It's very beautiful," said Honora.

"I'll have a whiskey and soda, if I may," announced Mrs. Rindge. "Open one, Georgie."

"The third to-day," said Mr. Pembroke, sententiously, as he obeyed.

"I don't care. I don't see what business it is of yours."

"Except to open them," he replied.

"You'd have made a fortune as a barkeeper," she ob-observed, dispassionately, as she watched the process.

"He's made fortunes for a good many," said Chiltern.

"Not without some expert assistance I could mention," Mr. Pembroke retorted.

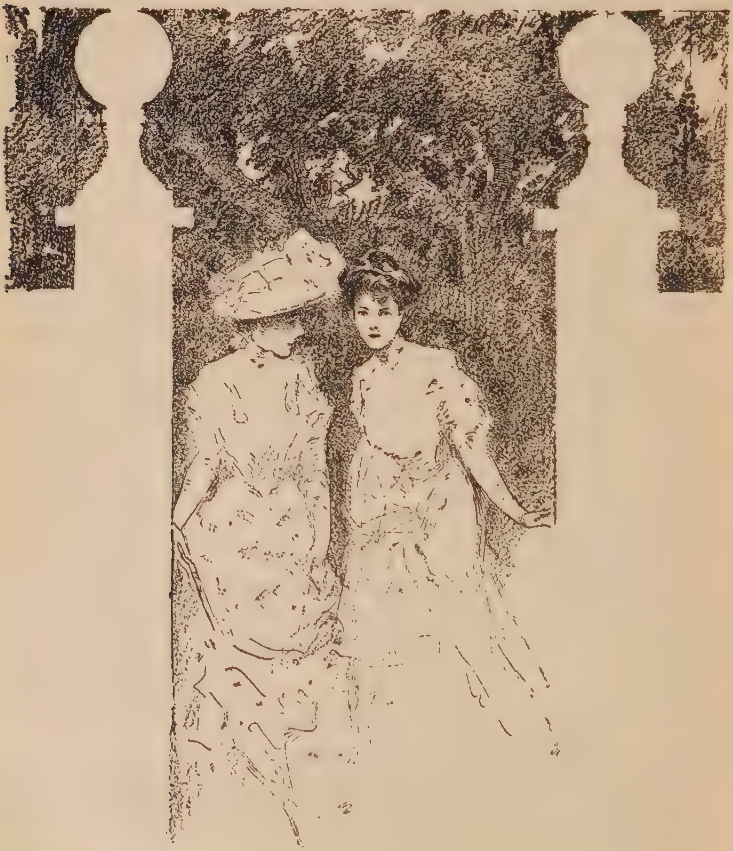
At this somewhat pointed reference to his ancient habits, Chiltern laughed.

"You've each had three to-day yourselves," said Mrs. Rindge, in whose bosom Mr. Pembroke's remark evidently rankled, "without counting those you had before you left the club."

Afterwards Mrs. Kame expressed a desire to walk about a little, a proposal received with disfavour by all but Honora, who as hostess responded.

"I feel perfectly delightful," declared Mrs. Rindge. "What's the use of moving about?" And she sank back in the cushions of her chair.

This observation was greeted with unrestrained merriment by Mr. Pembroke and Hugh. Honora, sick at heart, led Mrs. Kame across the garden and through the gate in the wall. It was a perfect evening of early June, the great lawn a vivid green in the slanting light. All day the cheerful music of the horse-mowers had been heard, and the air was fragrant with the odour of grass freshly cut. The long shadows of the maples and beeches



stretched towards the placid surface of the lake, dimpled here and there by a fish's swirl: the spiræas were laden as with freshly fallen snow, a lone Judas-tree was decked in pink. The steep pastures beyond the water were touched with gold, while to the northward, on the distant hills, tender blue lights gathered lovingly around the copses. Mrs. Kame sighed.

"What a terrible thing it is," she said, "that we are never satisfied! It's the men who ruin all this for us, I believe, and prevent our enjoying it. Look at Adèle."

Honora had indeed looked at her.

"I found out the other day what is the matter with her. She's madly in love with Dicky."

"With — with her former husband?"

"Yes, with poor little innocent Dicky Farnham, who's probably still congratulating himself, like a canary bird that's got out of a cage. Somehow Dicky's always reminded me of a canary; perhaps it's his name. Isn't it odd that she should be in love with him?"

"I think," replied Honora, slowly, "that it's a tragedy."

"It is a tragedy," Mrs. Kame hastily agreed. "To me, this case is one of the most incomprehensible aspects of the tender passion. Adèle's idea of existence is a steeplechase with nothing but water-jumps, Dicky's to loiter around in a gypsy van, and sit in the sun. During his brief matrimonial experience with her, he nearly died for want of breath — or rather the life was nearly shaken out of him. And yet she wants Dicky again. She'd run away with him to-morrow if he should come within hailing distance of her."

"And her husband?" asked Honora.

"Eustace? Did you ever see him? That accounts for your question. He only left France long enough to come over here and make love to her, and he swears he'll never leave it again. If she divorces him, he'll have to have alimony."

At last Honora was able to gain her own room, but even seclusion, though preferable to the companionship of her guests, was almost intolerable. The tragedy of Mrs.

Rindge had served — if such a thing could be — to enhance her own; a sudden spectacle of a woman in a more advanced stage of desperation. Would she, Honora, ever become like that? Up to the present she felt that suffering had refined her, and a great love had burned away all that was false. But now — now that her god had turned to clay, what would happen? Desperation seemed possible, notwithstanding the awfulness of the example. No, she would never come to that! And she repeated it over and over to herself as she dressed, as though to strengthen her will.

During her conversation with Mrs. Kame she had more than once suspected, in spite of her efforts, that the lady had read her state of mind. For Mrs. Kame's omissions were eloquent to the discerning: Chiltern's relatives had been mentioned with a casualness intended to imply that no breach existed, and the fiction that Honora could at any moment take up her former life delicately sustained. Mrs. Kame had adaptably chosen the attitude, after a glance around her, that Honora preferred Highlawns to the world: a choice of which she let it be known that she approved, while deploring that a frivolous character put such a life out of the question for herself. She made her point without over-emphasis. On the other hand, Honora had read Mrs. Kame. No very careful perusal was needed to convince her that the lady was unmoral, and that in characteristics she resembled the chameleon. But she read deeper. She perceived that Mrs. Kame was convinced that she, Honora, would adjust herself to the new conditions after a struggle; and that while she had a certain sympathy in the struggle, Mrs. Kame was of opinion that the sooner it was over with the better. All women were born to be disillusionized. Such was the key, at any rate, to the lady's conduct that evening at dinner, when she capped the anecdotes of Mr. Pembroke and Mrs. Rindge and even of Chiltern with others not less risquée but more fastidiously and ingeniously suggestive. The reader may be spared their recital.

Since the meeting in the restaurant the day before, which had resulted in Hugh's happy inspiration that the festival begun should be continued indefinitely at Highlawns, a kind of freemasonry had sprung up between the four. Honora found herself, mercifully, outside the circle: for such was the lively character of the banter that a considerable adroitness was necessary to obtain, between the talk and laughter, the ear of the company. And so full were they of the reminiscences which had been crowded into the thirty hours or so they had spent together, that her comparative silence remained unnoticed. To cite an example, Mr. Pembroke was continually being addressed as the Third Vice-president, an allusion that Mrs. Rindge eventually explained.

"You ought to have been with us coming up on the train," she cried to Honora; "I thought surely we'd be put off. We were playing bridge in the little room at the end of the car when the conductor came for our tickets. Georgie had 'em in his pocket, but he told the man to go away, that he was the third vice-president of the road, and we were his friends. The conductor asked him if he were Mr. Wheeler, or some such name, and Georgie said he was surprised he didn't know him. Well, the man stood there in the door, and Georgie picked up his hand and made it hearts — or was it diamonds, Georgie?"

"Spades," said that gentleman, promptly.

"At any rate," Mrs. Rindge continued, "we all began to play, although we were ready to blow up with laughter, and after a while Georgie looked around and said, 'What, are you there yet?' My dear, you ought to have seen the conductor's face! He said it was his duty to establish Georgie's identity, or something like that, and Georgie told him to get off at the next station and buy Waring's Magazine — was that it, Georgie?"

"How the deuce should I know?"

"Well, some such magazine. Georgie said he'd find an article in it on the Railroad Kings and Princes of America, and that his picture, Georgie's, was among the very first!" At this juncture in her narrative Mrs. Rindge shrieked with laughter, in which she was joined by Mrs. Kame and Hugh; and she pointed a forefinger across the table at Mr. Pembroke, who went on solemnly eating his dinner. "Georgie gave him ten cents with which to buy the magazine," she added a little hysterically. "Well, there was a frightful row, and a lot of men came down to that end of the car, and we had to shut the door. The conductor said the most outrageous things, and Georgie pretended to be very indignant, too, and gave him the tickets under protest. He told Georgie he ought to be in an asylum for the criminally insane, and Georgie advised him to get a photograph album of the high officials of the railroad. The conductor said Georgie's picture was probably in the rogue's gallery. And we lost two packs of cards out of the window."

Such had been the more innocent if eccentric diversions with which they had whiled away the time. When dinner was ended, a renewal of the bridge game was proposed, for it had transpired at the dinner-table that Mrs. Rindge and Hugh had been partners all day, as a result of which there was a considerable balance in their favour. This balance Mr. Pembroke was palpably anxious to wipe out, or at least to reduce. But Mrs. Kame insisted that Honora should cut in, and the others supported her.

"We tried our best to get a man for you," said Mrs. Rindge to Honora. "Didn't we, Abby? But in the little time we had, it was impossible. The only man we saw was Ned Carrington, and Hugh said he didn't think you'd want him."

"Hugh showed a rare perception," said Honora.

Be it recorded that she smiled. One course had been clear to her from the first, although she found it infinitely difficult to follow; she was determined, cost what it might, to carry through her part of the affair with dignity, but without stiffness. This is not the place to dwell upon the tax to her strength.

"Come on, Honora," said Hugh, "cut in." His tone was of what may be termed a rough good nature. She had not seen him alone since his return, but he had seemed distinctly desirous that she should enjoy the festivities he had provided. And not to yield would have been to betray herself.

The game, with its intervals of hilarity, was inaugurated in the library, and by midnight it showed no signs of abating. At this hour the original four occupied the table for the second time, and endurance has its limits. The atmosphere of Liberty Hall that prevailed made Honora's retirement easier.

"I'm sure you won't mind if I go to bed," she said. "I've been so used to the routine of — of the chickens." She smiled. "And I've spent the day in the open air."

"Certainly, my dear," said Mrs. Kame; "I know exactly how one feels in the country. I'm sure it's dreadfully late. We'll have one more rubber, and then stop."

"Oh, don't stop," replied Honora; "please play as long as you like."

They didn't stop — at least after one more rubber. Honora, as she lay in the darkness, looking through the open square of her window at the silver stars, heard their voices and their laughter floating up at intervals from below, and the little clock on her mantel had struck the hour of three when the scraping of chairs announced the breaking up of the party. And even after that an unconscionable period elapsed, beguiled, undoubtedly, by anecdotes; spells of silence — when she thought they had gone — ending in more laughter. Finally there was a crash of breaking glass, a climax of uproarious mirth, and all was still. . . .

She could not have slept much, but the birds were singing when she finally awoke, the sunlight pouring into her window. And the hands of her clock pointed to half-past seven when she rang her bell. It was a relief to breakfast alone, or at least to sip her coffee in solitude. And the dew was still on the grass as she crossed the wide lawn and made her way around the lake to the path that entered the woods at its farther end. She was not tired, yet she would have liked to have lain down under the green panoply of the forest, where the wild flowers shyly raised sweet faces to be kissed, and lose herself in the forgetfulness of an eternal sleep; never to go back again to an Eden contaminated. But when she lingered the melody of a thrush pierced her through and through. At last she turned and reluctantly retraced her steps, as one whose hour of reprieve has expired.

If Mrs. Rindge had a girlish air when fully arrayed for the day, she looked younger and more angular still in that article of attire known as a dressing-gown. And her eyes, Honora remarked, were peculiarly bright: glittering, perhaps, would better express the impression they gave; as though one got a glimpse through them of an inward consuming fire. Her laughter rang shrill and clear as Honora entered the hall by the rear door, and the big clock proclaimed that the hour was half-past eleven. Hugh and Mr. Pembroke were standing at the foot of the stairs, gazing upward. And Honora, following their glances, beheld the two ladies, in the negligée referred to above, with their elbows on the railing of the upper hall and their faces between their hands, engaged in a lively exchange of compliments with the gentlemen. Mrs. Kame looked sleepy.

"Such a night!" she said, suppressing a yawn. "My dear, you did well to go to bed."

"And to cap it all," cried Mrs. Rindge, "Georgie fell over backwards in one of those beautiful Adam chairs, and there's literally nothing left of it. If an ocean steamer had hit it, or a freight train, it couldn't have been more thoroughly demolished."

"You pushed me," declared Mr. Pembroke.

"Did I, Hugh? I barely touched him."

"You knocked him into a cocked hat," said Hugh. "And if you'd been in that kimona, you could have done it even easier."

"Georgie broke the whole whiskey service, — or whatever it is," Mrs. Rindge went on, addressing Honora again. "He fell into it."

"He's all right this morning," observed Mrs. Kame, critically.

"I think I'll take to swallowing swords and glass and things in public. I can do it so well," said Mr. Pembroke.

"I hope you got what you like for breakfast," said Honora to the ladies.

"Hurry up and come down, Adèle," said Hugh, "if you want to look over the horses before lunch."

"It's Georgie's fault," replied Mrs. Rindge; "he's been standing in the door of my sitting-room for a whole half hour talking nonsense."

A little later they all set out for the stables. These buildings at Highlawns, framed by great trees, were old-fashioned and picturesque, surrounding three sides of a court, with a yellow brick wall on the fourth. The roof of the main building was capped by a lantern, the home of countless pigeons. Mrs. Rindge was in a habit, and one by one the saddle horses were led out, chiefly for her inspection; and she seemed to Honora to become another woman as she looked them over with a critical eye and discussed them with Hugh and O'Grady, the stud-groom, and talked about pedigrees and strains. For she was renowned in this department of sport on many fields, both for recklessness and skill.

"Where did you get that brute, Hugh?" she asked presently.

Honora, who had been talking to Pembroke, looked around with a start. And at the sight of the great black horse, bought on that unforgettable day, she turned suddenly faint.

"Over here in the country about ten miles," Chiltern was saying. "I heard of him, but I didn't expect anything until I went to look at him last week."

"What do you call him?" asked Mrs. Rindge.

"I haven't named him."

"I'll give you a name."

Chiltern looked at her. "What is it?" he said.

"Oblivion," she replied.

"By George, Adèle," he exclaimed, "you have a way of hitting it off!"

"Will you let me ride him this afternoon?" she asked.

"I'm a — a candidate for oblivion." She laughed a little and her eyes shone feverishly.

"No you don't," he said. "I'm giving you the grey. He's got enough in him for any woman — even for you. And besides, I don't think the black ever felt a side saddle, or any other kind, until last week."

"I've got another habit," she said eagerly. "I'd rather ride him astride. I'll match you to see who has him."

Chiltern laughed.

"No you don't," he repeated. "I'll ride him to-day, and consider it to-morrow."

"I — I think I'll go back to the house," said Honora to Pembroke. "It's rather hot here in the sun."

"I'm not very keen about sunshine, either," he declared.

At lunch she was unable to talk; to sustain, at least, a conversation. That word oblivion, which Mrs. Rindge had so aptly applied to the horse, was constantly on her lips, and it would not have surprised her if she had spoken it. She felt as though a heavy weight lay on her breast, and to relieve its intolerable pressure drew in her breath deeply. She was wild with fear. The details of the great room fixed themselves indelibly in her brain; the subdued light, the polished table laden with silver and glass, the roses, and the purple hot-house grapes. All this seemed in some way to be an ironic prelude to disaster. Hugh, pausing in his badinage with Mrs. Rindge, looked at her.

"Cheer up, Honora," he said.

"I'm afraid this first house-party is too much for her," said Mrs. Kame.

Honora made some protest that seemed to satisfy them, tried to rally herself, and succeeded sufficiently to pass muster. After lunch they repaired again to the bridge table, and at four Hugh went upstairs to change into his riding clothes. Five minutes longer she controlled herself, and then made some paltry excuse, indifferent now as to what they said or thought, and followed him. She knocked at his dressing-room door and entered. He was drawing on his boots. "Hello, Honora," he said.

Honora turned to his man, and dismissed him.

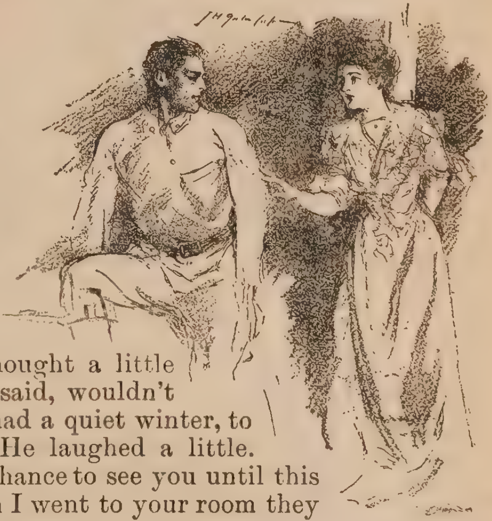
"I wish to speak to Mr. Chiltern alone."

Chiltern paused in his tugging at the straps, and looked up at her.

"What's the matter with you to-day, Honora?" he asked. "You looked like the chief mourner at a funeral all through lunch."

He was a little on edge, that she knew. He gave another tug at the boot, and while she was still hesitating, he began again.

"I ought to apologize, I know, for bringing these people up without notice, but I didn't suppose you'd object when you understood how naturally it all came about. I thought a little livening up, as I said, wouldn't hurt us. We've had a quiet winter, to put it mildly." He laughed a little. "I didn't have a chance to see you until this morning, and when I went to your room they told me you'd gone out."



"Hugh," she said, laying her hand on his shoulder. "It isn't the guests. If you want people, and they amuse you, I'm — I'm glad to have them. And if I've seemed to be — cold to them, I'm sorry. I tried my best — I mean I did not intend to be cold. I'll sit up all night with them, if you like. And I didn't come to reproach you, Hugh. I'll never do that — I've got no right to."

She passed her hand over her eyes. If she had any wrongs, if she had suffered any pain, the fear that obsessed her obliterated all. In spite of her disillusionment, in spite of her newly acquired ability to see him as he was, enough love remained to scatter, when summoned, her pride to the winds.

Having got on both boots, he stood up.

"What's the trouble, then?" he asked. And he took an instant's hold of her chin — a habit he had — and smiled at her.

He little knew how sublime, in its unconscious effrontery, his question was! She tried to compose herself, that she might be able to present comprehensively to his finite masculine mind the ache of to-day.

"Hugh, it's that black horse." She could not bring herself to pronounce the name Mrs. Rindge had christened him.

"What about him?" he said, putting on his waistcoat.

"Don't ride him!" she pleaded. "I — I'm afraid of him — I've been afraid of him ever since that day. . . . It may be a foolish feeling, I know. Sometimes the feelings that hurt women most are foolish. If I tell you that if you ride him you will torture me, I'm sure you'll grant what I ask. It's such a little thing — and it means so much — so much agony to me. I'd do anything for you — give up anything in the world at your slightest wish. Don't ride him!"

"This is a ridiculous fancy of yours, Honora. The horse is all right. I've ridden dozens of worse ones."

"Oh, I'm sure he isn't," she cried; "call it fancy, call it instinct, call it anything you like — but I feel it, Hugh. That woman — Mrs. Rindge — knows something about horses, and she said he was a brute."

"Yes," he interrupted, with a short laugh, "and she wants to ride him."

"Hugh, she's reckless. I — I've been watching her since she came here, and I'm sure she's reckless with — with a purpose."

"You're morbid," he said. "She's one of the best sportswomen in the country — that's the reason she wanted to ride the horse. Look here, Honora, I'd accede to any reasonable request. But what do you expect me to do?" he demanded; "go down and say I'm afraid to ride him? or that my wife doesn't want me to? I'd never hear the end of it. And the first thing Adèle would do would be to jump on him herself — a little wisp of a woman that looks as if she couldn't hold a Shetland pony! Can't you see that what you ask is impossible?"

He started for the door to terminate a conversation which had already begun to irritate him. For his anger, in these days, was very near the surface. She made one more desperate appeal.

"Hugh — the man who sold him — he knew the horse was dangerous. I'm sure he did, from something he said to me while you were gone."

"These country people are all idiots and cowards," declared Chiltern. "I've known 'em a good while, and they haven't got the spirit of mongrel dogs. I was a fool to think that I could do anything for them. They're kind and neighbourly, aren't they?" he exclaimed. "If that old rascal flattered himself he deceived me, he was mistaken. He'd have been mightily pleased if the beast had broken my neck."

"Hugh —!"

"I can't, Honora. That's all there is to it, I can't. Now don't cut up about nothing. I'm sorry, but I've got to go. Adèle's waiting."

He came back, kissed her hurriedly, turned and opened the door. She followed him into the hallway, knowing that she had failed, knowing that she never could have succeeded. There she halted and watched him go down the stairs, and stood with her hands tightly pressed together: voices reached her, a hurrah from George Pembroke, and the pounding of hoofs on the driveway. It had seemed such a little thing to ask!

But she did not dwell upon this, now, when fear was gnawing her: how she had humbled her pride for days and weeks and months for him, and how he had refused her paltry request lest he should be laughed at. Her reflections then were not on his waning love. She was filled with the terror of losing him — of losing all that remained to her in the world. Presently she began to walk slowly towards the stairs, descended them, and looked around her. The hall, at least, had not changed. She listened, and a bee hummed in through the open doorway. A sudden longing for companionship possessed her — no matter whose; and she walked hurriedly, as though she were followed, through the empty rooms until she came upon George Pembroke stretched at full length on the leather-covered lounge in the library. He opened his eyes, and got up with alacrity.

"Please don't move," she said.

He looked at her. Although his was not what may be called a sympathetic temperament, he was not without a certain knowledge of women; superficial, perhaps. But most men of his type have seen them in despair; and since he was not related to this particular despair, what finer feelings he had were the more easily aroused. It must have been clear to her then that she had lost the power to dissemble, all the clearer because of Mr. Pembroke's cheerfulness.

"I wasn't going to sleep," he assured her. "Circumstantial evidence is against me, I know. Where's Abby? reading French literature?"

"I haven't seen her," replied Honora.

"She usually goes to bed with a play at this hour. It's a horrid habit — going to bed, I mean. Don't you think? Would you mind showing me about a little?"

"Do you really wish to?" asked Honora, incredulously.

"I haven't been here since my senior year," said Mr. Pembroke. "If the old General were alive, he could probably tell you something of that visit — he wrote to my father about it. I always liked the place, although the General was something of a drawback. Fine old man, with no memory."

"I should have thought him to have had a good memory," she said.

"I have always been led to believe that he was once sent away from college in his youth, — for his health," he explained significantly. "No man has a good memory who can't remember that. Perhaps the battle of Gettysburg wiped it out."

Thus, in his own easy-going fashion, Mr. Pembroke sought to distract her. She put on a hat, and they walked about, the various scenes recalling incidents of holidays he had spent at Highlawns. And after a while Honora was thankful that chance had sent her in this hour to him rather than to Mrs. Kame. For the sight, that morning, of this lady in her dressing-gown over the stairway, had seemingly set the seal on a growing distaste. Her feeling had not been the same about Mrs. Rindge: Mrs. Kame's actions savoured of deliberate choice, of an inherent and calculating wickedness.

Had the distraction of others besides himself been the chief business of Mr. Pembroke's life, he could not have succeeded better that afternoon. He must be given this credit: his motives remain problematical; at length he even drew laughter from her. The afternoon wore on, they returned to the garden for tea, and a peaceful stillness continued to reign about them, the very sky smiling placidly at her fears. Not by assuring her that Hugh was an unusual horseman, that he had passed through many dangers beside which this was a bagatelle, could the student of the feminine by her side have done half so well. And it may have been that his success encouraged him as he saw emerging, as the result of his handiwork, an unexpectedly attractive — if still somewhat serious — woman from the gloom that had enveloped her. That she should still have her distrait moments was but natural.

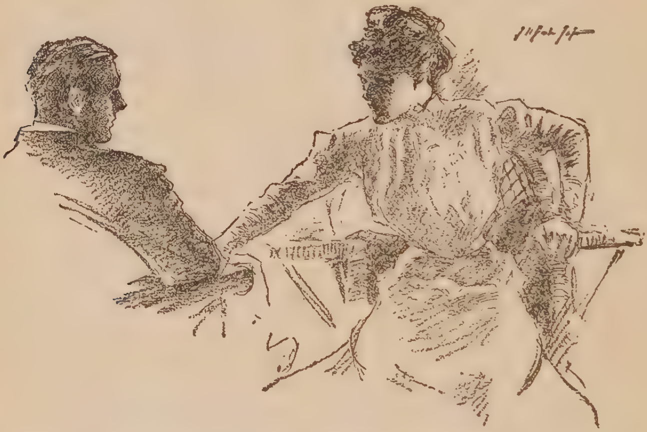
He talked to her largely about Hugh, of whom he appeared sincerely fond. The qualities which attracted Mr. Pembroke in his own sex were somewhat peculiar, and seemingly consisted largely in a readiness to drop the business at hand, whatever it might be, at the suggestion of a friend to do something else; the "something else," of course, to be the conception of an ingenious mind. And it was while he was in the midst of an anecdote proving the existence of this quality in his friend that he felt a sudden clutch on his arm.

They listened. Faintly, very faintly, could be heard the sound of hoof beats; rapid, though distant.

"Do you hear?" she whispered, and still held his arm.

"It's just like them to race back," said Pembroke, with admirable nonchalance.

"But they wouldn't come back at this time — it's too early. Hugh always takes long rides. They started for Hubbard's — it's twelve miles."



"Adèle changes her mind every minute of the day," he said.

"Listen!" she cried, and her clutch tightened. The hoof beats grew louder. "It's only one — it's only one horse!"

Before he could answer, she was already halfway up the garden path towards the house. He followed her as she ran panting through the breakfast room, the dining room, and drawing-room, and when they reached the hall, Starling, the butler, and two footmen were going out at the door. A voice — Mrs. Kame's — cried out, "What is it?" over the stairs, but they paid no heed. As they reached the steps they beheld the slight figure of Mrs. Rindge on a flying horse coming towards them up the driveway. Her black straw hat had slipped to the back of her neck, her hair was awry, her childish face white as paper. Honora put her hand to her heart. There was no need to tell her the news — she had known these many hours.

Mrs. Rindge's horse came over the round grass-plot of the circle and planted his fore feet in the turf as she pulled him up. She lurched forward. It was Starling who lifted her off — George Pembroke stood by Honora.

"My God, Adèle," he exclaimed, "why don't you speak?"

She was staring at Honora.

"I can't!" she cried. "I can't tell you — it's too terrible! The horse —" she seemed to choke.

It was Honora who went up to her with a calmness that awed them.

"Tell me," she said, "is he dead?"

Mrs. Rindge nodded, and broke into hysterical sobbing.

"And I wanted to ride him myself," she sobbed, as they led her up the steps.

In less than an hour they brought him home and laid him in the room in which he had slept from boyhood, and shut the door. Honora looked into his face. It was calm at last, and his body strangely at rest. The passions which had tortured it and driven it hither and thither through a wayward life had fled: the power gone that would brook no guiding hand, that had known no master. It was not until then that she fell upon him, weeping. . . .

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH MR. ERWIN SEES PARIS

As she glanced around the sitting-room of her apartment in Paris one September morning she found it difficult, in some respects, to realize that she had lived in it for more than five years. After Chiltern's death she had sought a refuge, and she had found it here: a refuge in which she meant — if her intention may be so definitely stated — to pass the remainder of her days.

As a refuge it had become dear to her. When first she had entered it she had looked about her numbly, thankful for walls and roof, thankful for its remoteness from the haunts of the prying: as a shipwrecked castaway regards, at the first light, the cave into which he has stumbled into the darkness — gratefully. And gradually, castaway that she felt herself to be, she had adorned it lovingly, as one above whose horizon the sails of hope were not to rise; filled it with friends not chosen in a day, whose faithful ministrations were not to cease. Her books, but only those worthy to be bound and read again; the pictures she had bought when she had grown to know what pictures were; the music she had come to love for its eternal qualities — these were her companions.

The apartment was in the old quarter across the Seine, and she had found it by chance. The ancient family of which this hotel had once been the home would scarce have recognized, if they had returned, the part of it Honora occupied. The room in which she mostly lived was above the corner of the quiet street, and might have been more aptly called a sitting-room than a salon. Its panels were the most delicate of blue-gray, fantastically designed and outlined by ribbons of blue. Some of them contained her pictures. The chairs, the sofas, the little tabourets, were upholstered in yellow, their wood matching the panels. Above the carved mantel of yellowing marble was a quaintly shaped mirror extending to the high ceiling, and flanked on either side by sconces. The carpet was a golden brown, the hangings in the tall windows yellow. And in the morning the sun came in, not boisterously, but as a well-bred and cheerful guest. An amiable proprietor had permitted her also to add a wrought-iron balcony as an adjunct to this room, and sometimes she sat there on the warmer days reading under the seclusion of an awning, or gazing at the mysterious façades of the houses opposite, or at infrequent cabs or pedestrians below.

An archway led out of the sitting-room into a smaller room, once the boudoir of a marquise, now Honora's library. This was in blue and gold, and she had so far modified the design of the decorator as to replace the mirrors of the cases with glass; she liked to see her books. Beyond the library was a dining room in grey, with dark red hangings; it overlooked the forgotten garden of the hotel.

One item alone of news from the outer world, vital to her, had drifted to her retreat. Newspapers filled her with dread, but it was from a newspaper, during the first year of her retirement, that she had learned of the death of Howard Spence. A complication of maladies was mentioned, but the true underlying cause was implied in the article, and this had shocked but not surprised her. A ferment was in progress in her own country, the affairs of the Orange Trust Company being investigated, and its president under indictment at the hour of his demise. Her feelings at the time, and for months after, were complex. She had been moved to deep pity, for in spite of what he had told her of his business transactions, it was impossible for her to think of him as a criminal. That he had been the tool of others, she knew, but it remained a question in her mind how clearly he had perceived the immorality of his course, and of theirs. He had not been given to casuistry, and he had been brought up in a school the motto of which he had once succinctly stated: the survival of the fittest. He had not been, alas, one of those to survive.

Thus Honora had found it impossible to unravel the tangled skein of their relationship, to assign a definite amount of blame to each. She did not shirk hers, and was willing to accept a full measure. That she had done wrong in marrying him, and again in leaving him to marry another man, she acknowledged freely. Wrong as she knew this to have been, severely though she had been punished for it, she could not bring herself to an adequate penitence. She tried to remember him as he had been at Silverdale, and in the first months of their marriage, and not as he had afterwards become. There was no question in her mind, now that it was given her to see things more clearly, that she might have tried harder, much harder, to make their marriage a success. He might, indeed, have done more to protect and cherish her. It was a man's part to guard a woman against the evils with which she had been surrounded. On the other hand, she could not escape the fact, nor did she attempt to escape it, that she had had the more light of the two: and that, though the task were formidable, she might have fought to retain that light and infuse him with it.

That she did not hold herself guiltless is the important point. Many of her hours were spent in retrospection. She was, in a sense, as one dead, yet retaining her faculties; and these became infinitely keen now that she was deprived of the power to use them as guides through life. She felt that the power had come too late, like a legacy when one is old. And she contemplated the Honora of other days — of the flesh, as though she were now the spirit departed from that body; sorrowfully, poignantly regretful of the earthly motives, of the tarnished ideals by which it had been animated and led to destruction.

Even Hugh Chiltern had left her no illusions. She thought of him at times with much tenderness; whether she still loved him or not she could not say. She came to the conclusion that all capacity for intense feeling had been burned out of her. And she found that she could permit her mind to rest upon no period of her sojourn at Grenoble without a sense of horror; there had been no hour when she had seemed secure from haunting terror, no day that had not added its mite to the gathering evidence of an ultimate retribution. And it was like a nightmare to summon again this spectacle of the man going to pieces under her eyes. The whole incident in her life as time wore on assumed an aspect bizarre, incredible, as the follies of a night of madness appear in the saner light of morning. Her great love had bereft her of her senses, for had the least grain of sanity remained to her she might have known that the thing they attempted was impossible of accomplishment.

Her feeling now, after four years, might be described as relief. To employ again the figure of the castaway, she often wondered why she of all others had been rescued from the tortures of slow drowning and thrown up on an island. What had she done above the others to deserve preservation? It was inevitable that she should on occasions picture to herself the years with him that would have stretched ahead, even as the vision of them had come to her that morning when, in obedience to his telegram, she had told Starling to prepare for guests. Her escape had indeed been miraculous!

Although they had passed through a ceremony, the conviction had never taken root in her that she had been married to Chiltern. The tie that had united her to him had not been sacred, though it had been no less binding; more so, in fact. That tie would have become a shackle. Her perception of this, after his death, had led her to instruct her attorney to send back to his relatives all but a small income from his estate, enough for her to live on during her lifetime. There had been some trouble about this matter; Mrs. Grainger, in particular, had surprised her in making objections, and had finally written a letter which Honora received with a feeling akin to gratitude. Whether her own action had softened this lady's feelings, she never understood; she had cherished the letter for its unexpectedly charitable expressions. Chiltern's family had at last agreed to accept the estate on the condition that the income mentioned should be tripled. And to this Honora had consented. Money had less value than ever in her eyes.

She lived here in Paris in what may be called a certain peace, made no demands upon the world, and had no expectations from it. She was now in half mourning, and intended to remain so. Her isolation was of her own choice, if a stronger expression be not used. She was by no means an enforced outcast. And she was even aware that a certain sympathy for her had grown up amongst her former friends which had spread to the colony of her compatriots in Paris; in whose numbers there were some, by no means unrecognized, who had defied the conventions more than she. Hugh Chiltern's reputation, and the general knowledge of his career, had no doubt aided to increase this sympathy, but the dignity of her conduct since his death was at the foundation of it. Sometimes, on her walks and drives, she saw people bowing to her, and recognized friends or acquaintances of what seemed to her like a former existence.

Such had been her life in Paris until a certain day in early September, a month before this chapter opens. It was afternoon, and she was sitting in the balcony cutting a volume of memoirs when she heard the rattle of a cab on the cobbles below, and peered curiously over the edge of the railing. Although still half a block away, the national characteristics of the passenger were sufficiently apparent. He was an American — of that she was sure. And many Americans did not stray into that quarter. The length of his legs, for one thing, betrayed him: he found the seat of the fiacre too low, and had crossed one knee over the other. Other and less easily definable attributes he did not lack. And as he leaned against the faded blue cushions regarding with interest the buildings he passed, he seemed, like an ambassador, to convert the cab in which he rode into United States territory. Then she saw that it was Peter Erwin.

She drew back her head from the balcony rail, and tried to sit still and to think, but she was trembling as one stricken with a chill. The cab stopped; and presently, after an interval, his card was handed her. She rose, and stood for a moment with her hand against the wall before she went into the salon. None of the questions she had asked herself were answered. Was she glad to see him? and what would be his attitude towards her? When she beheld him standing before her she had strength only to pronounce his name.

He came forward quickly and took her hand and looked down into her face. She regarded him tremulously, instinctively guessing the vital importance of this moment for him; and she knew then that he had been looking forward to it in mingled hope and dread, as one who gazes seaward after a night of tempest for the ship he has seen at dusk in the offing. What had the tempest done to her? Such was his question. And her heart leaped as she saw the light growing in his eyes, for it meant much to her that he should see that she was not utterly dismantled. She felt his own hand tremble as he relinquished hers. He was greatly moved; his voice, too, betrayed it.

"You see I have found you," he said.

"Yes," she answered; "— why did you come?"

"Why have I always come to you, when it was possible?" he asked.

"No one ever had such a friend, Peter. Of that I am sure."

"I wanted to see Paris," he said, "before I grew too decrepit to enjoy it."

She smiled, and turned away.

"Have you seen much of it?"

"Enough to wish to see more."

"When did you arrive?"

"Some time in the night," he said, "from Cherbourg. And I'm staying at a very grand hotel, which might be anywhere. A man I crossed with on the steamer took me there. I think I'd move to one of the quieter ones, the French ones, if I were a little surer of my pronunciation and the subjunctive mood."

"You don't mean to say you've been studying French!"

He coloured a little, and laughed.

"You think it ridiculous at my time of life? I suppose you're right. You should have seen me trying to understand the cabmen. The way these people talk reminds me more of a Gatling gun than anything I can think of. It certainly isn't human."

"Perhaps you have come over as ambassador," she suggested. "When I saw you in the cab, even before I recognized you, I thought of a bit of our soil broken off and drifted over here."

Her voice did not quite sustain the lighter note — the emotion his visit was causing her was too great. He brought with him into her retreat not so much a flood of memories as of sensations. He was a man whose image time with difficulty obliterates, whose presence was a shining thing: so she had grown to value it in proportion as she had had less of it. She did inevitably recall the last time she had seen him, in the little Western city, and how he had overwhelmed her, invaded her with doubts and aroused the spirit which had possessed her to fight fiercely for its foothold. And to-day his coming might be likened to the entrance of a great physician into the room of a distant and lonely patient whom amidst wide ministrations he has not forgotten. She saw now that he had been right. She had always seen it, clearly indeed when he had been beside her, but the spirit within her had been too strong, — until now. Now, when it had plundered her soul of treasures — once so little valued — it had fled. Such were her thoughts.

The great of heart undoubtedly possess this highest quality of the physician, — if the statement may thus be put backhandedly, — and Peter Erwin instinctively understood the essential of what was going on within her. He appeared to take a delight in the fancy she had suggested, that he had brought a portion of the newer world to France.

"Not a piece of the Atlantic coast, certainly," he replied. "One of the muddy islands, perhaps, of the Mississippi."

"All the more representative," she said. "You seem to have taken possession of Paris, Peter — not Paris of you. You have annexed the seat of the Capets, and brought democracy at last into the Faubourg."

"Without a Reign of Terror," he added quizzically.

"If you are not ambassador, what are you?" she asked. "I have expected at any moment to read in the *Figaro* that you were President of the United States."

"I am the American tourist," he declared, "with Baedeker for my Bible, who desires to be shown everything. And I have already discovered that the legend of the fabulous wealth of the Indies is still in force here. There are many who are willing to believe that in spite of my modest appearance — maybe because of it — I have sailed over in a galleon filled with gold. Already I have been approached from every side by confidential gentlemen who announced that they spoke English — one of them said 'American' — who have offered to show me many things, and who have betrayed enough interest in me to inquire whether I were married or single."

Honora laughed. They were seated in the balcony by this time, and he had the volume of memoirs on his knee, fingering it idly.

"What did you say to them?" she asked.

"I told them I was the proud father of ten children," he replied. "That seemed to stagger them, but only for a moment. They offered to take us all to the Louvre."

"Peter, you are ridiculous! But, in spite of your nationality, you don't look exactly gullible."

"That is a relief," he said. "I had begun to think I ought to leave my address and my watch with the Con[illegible] General. . . ."

Of such a nature was the first insidious rupture of that routine she had grown to look upon as changeless for the years to come, of the life she had chosen for its very immutable quality. Even its pangs of loneliness had acquired a certain sweet taste. Partly from a fear of a world that had hurt her, partly from fear of herself, she had made her burrow deep, that heat and cold, the changing seasons, and love and hate might be things far removed. She had sought to remove comparisons, too, from the limits of her vision; to cherish and keep alive, indeed, such regrets as she had, but to make no new ones.

Often had she thought of Peter Erwin, and it is not too much to say that he had insensibly grown into an ideal. He had come to represent to her the great thing she had missed in life, missed by feverish searching in the wrong places, digging for gold where the ground had glittered. And, if the choice had been given her, she would have preferred his spiritual to his bodily companionship — for a while, at least. Some day, when she should feel sure that desire had ceased to throb, when she should have acquired an unshakable and absolute resignation, she would see him. It is not too much to say, if her feeling be not misconstrued and stretched far beyond her own conception of it, that he was her one remaining interest in the world. She had scanned the letters of her aunt and uncle for knowledge of his doings, and had felt her curiosity justified by a certain proprietorship that she did not define. Faith in humankind, or the lack of it, usually makes itself felt through one's comparative contemporaries. That her uncle was a good man, for instance, had no such effect upon Honora as the fact that Peter was a good man. And that he had held a true course had gradually become a very vital thing to her, perhaps the most vital thing; and she could have imagined no greater personal calamity now than to have seen him inconsistent. For there are such men, and most people have known them. They are the men who, unconsciously, keep life sweet.

Yet she was sorry he had invaded her hiding-place. She had not yet achieved peace, and much of the weary task would have to be done over after he was gone.

In the meantime she drifted with astounding ease into another existence. For it was she, and not the confidential gentlemen, who showed Peter Paris: not the careless, pleasure-loving Paris of the restaurants, but of the Cluny and the Carnavalet. The Louvre even was not neglected, and as they entered it first she recalled with still unaccustomed laughter his reply to the proffered services of the guide. Indeed, there was much laughter in their excursions: his native humour sprang from the same well that held his seriousness. She was amazed at his ability to strip a sham and leave it grotesquely naked ; shams the risible aspect of which she had never observed in spite of the familiarity four years had given her. Some of his own countrymen and countrywomen afforded him the greatest amusement in their efforts to carry off acquired European "personalities,"—combinations of assumed indifference and effrontery, and an accent the like of which was never heard before. But he was neither bitter nor crude in his criticisms. He made her laugh, but he never made her ashamed. His chief faculty seemed to be to give her the power to behold, with astonishing clearness, objects and truths which had lain before her eyes, and yet hidden. And she had not thought to acquire any more truths.

The depth of his pleasure in the things he saw was likewise a revelation to her. She was by no means a bad guide to the Louvre and the Luxembourg, but the light in her which had come slowly flooded him with radiance at the sight of a statue or a picture. He would stop with an exclamation and stand gazing, self-forgetful, for incredible periods, and she would watch him, filled with a curious sense of the limitations of an appreciation she had thought complete. Where during his busy life had he got this thing which others had sought in many voyages in vain?

Other excursions they made, and sometimes these absorbed a day. It was a wonderful month, that Parisian September, which Honora, when she allowed herself to think, felt that she had no right to. A month filled to the brim with colour: the stone façades of the houses, which in certain lights were what the French so aptly call bleuâtre; the dense green foliage of the horse-chestnut trees, the fantastic iron grills, the Arc de Triomphe in the centre of its circle at sunset, the wide shaded avenues radiating from it, the bewildering Champs Elyseés, the blue waters of the Seine and the graceful bridges spanning it, Notre Dame against the sky. Their walks took them, too, into quainter, forgotten regions where history was grim and half-effaced, and they speculated on the France of other days.

They went farther afield, and it was given them to walk together down green vistas cut for kings, to linger on terraces with the river far below them, and the roofs of Paris in the hazy distance; that Paris, sullen so long, the mutterings of which the kings who had sat there must have heard with dread; that Paris which had finally risen in its wrath and taken the pleasure-houses and the parks for itself.

Once they went out to Chantilly, the cameo-like château that stands mirrored in its waters, and wandered through the alleys there. Honora had left her parasol on the parapet, and as they returned Peter went to get it, while she awaited him at a little distance. A group was chatting gayly on the lawn, and one of them, a middle-aged, well-dressed man hailed him with an air of fellowship, and Peter stopped for a moment's talk.

"We were speaking of ambassadors the other day," he said when he joined her; "that was our own, Minturn."

"We were speaking of them nearly a month ago," she said.

"A month ago! I can't believe it!" he exclaimed.

"What did he say to you?" Honora inquired presently.

"He was abusing me for not letting him know I was in Paris."

"Peter, you ought to have let him know!"

"I didn't come over here to see the ambassador," answered Peter, gayly.

She talked less than usual on their drive homeward, but he did not seem to notice the fact. Dusk was already lurking in the courtyards and byways of the quiet quarter when the porter let them in, and the stone stairway of the old hotel was almost in darkness. The sitting-room, with its yellow hangings snugly drawn and its pervading but soft light, was a grateful change. And while she was gone to remove her veil and hat, Peter looked around it.

It was redolent of her. A high vase of remarkable beauty, filled with white roses, stood on the guéridon. He went forward and touched it, and closed his eyes as though in pain. When he opened them he saw her standing in the archway.

She had taken off her coat, and was in a simple white muslin gown, with a black belt — a costume that had become habitual. Her age was thirty. The tragedy and the gravity of her life during these later years had touched her with something that before was lacking. In the street, in the galleries, people had turned to look at her; not with impudent stares. She caught attention, aroused imagination. Once, the year before, she had had a strange experience with a well-known painter, who, in an impulsive note, had admitted following her home and bribing the concierge. He craved a few sittings. Her expression now, as she looked at Peter, was graver than usual.

"You must not come to-morrow," she said.

"I thought we were going to Versailles again," he replied in surprise. "I have made the arrangements."

"I have changed my mind. I'm not going."

"You want to postpone it?" he asked.

She took a chair beside the little blaze in the fireplace.

"Sit down, Peter. I wish to say something to you. I have been wishing to do so for some time."

"Do you object if I stand a moment?" he said. "I feel so much more comfortable standing, especially when I am going to be scolded."

"Yes," she admitted, "I am going to scold you. Your conscience has warned you."

"On the contrary," he declared, "it has never been quieter. If I have offended, it is through ignorance."

"It is through charity, as usual," she said in a low voice. "If your conscience be quiet, mine is not. It is in myself that I am disappointed — I have been very selfish. I have usurped you. I have known it all along, and I have done very wrong in not relinquishing you before."

"Who would have shown me Paris?" he exclaimed.

"No," she continued, "you would not have been alone. If I had needed proof of that fact, I had it to-day — "

"Oh, Minturn," he interrupted; "think of me hanging about an Embassy and trying not to spill tea!" And he smiled at the image that presented.

Her own smile was fleeting.

"You would never do that, I know," she said gravely. "You are still too modest, Peter, but the time has gone by when I can be easily deceived. You have a great reputation among men of affairs, an unique one. In spite of the fact that you are distinctly American, you have a wide interest in what is going on in the world. And you have an opportunity here to meet people of note, people really worth while from every point of view. You have no right to neglect it."

He was silent a moment, looking down at her. She was leaning forward, her eyes fixed on the fire, her hands clasped between her knees.

"Do you think I care for that?" he asked.

"You ought to care," she said, without looking up. "And it is my duty to try to make you care."

"Honora, why do you think I came over here?" he said.

"To see Paris," she answered. "I have your own word for it. To — to continue your education. It never seems to stop."

"Did you really believe that?"

"Of course I believed it. What could be more natural? And you have never had a holiday like this."

"No," he agreed. "I admit that."

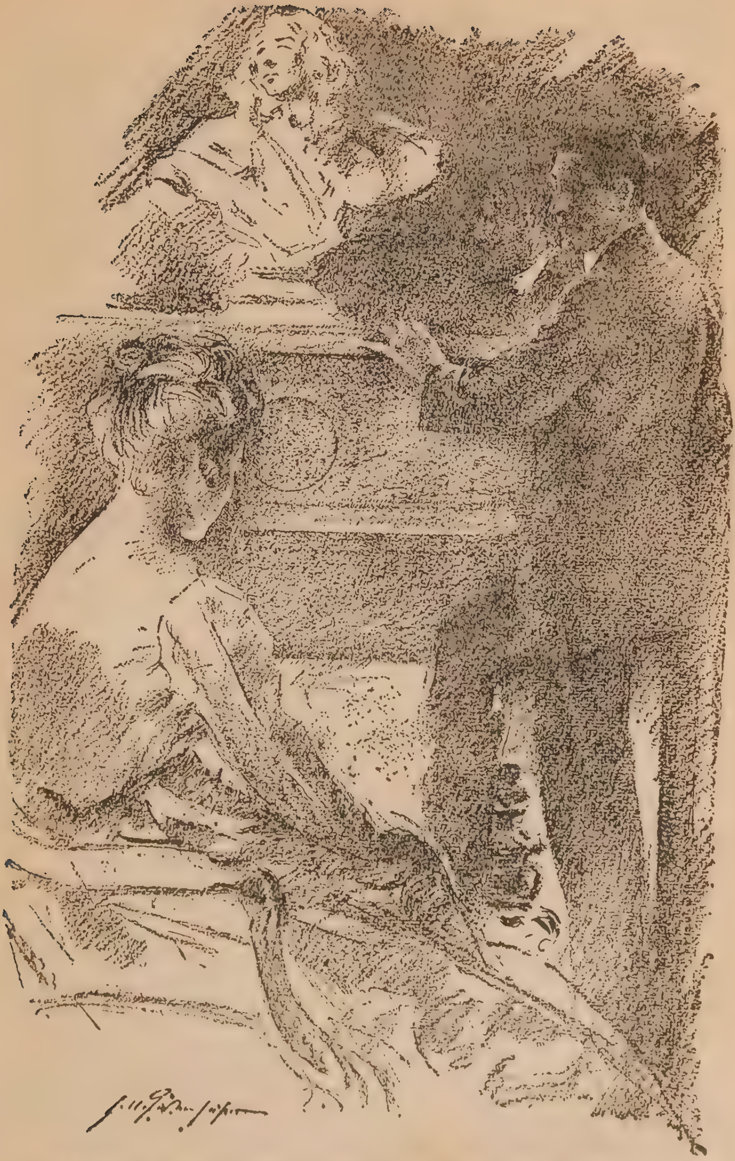
"I don't know how much longer you are going to stay," she said. "You have not been abroad before, and there are other places you ought to go."

"I'll get you to make out an itinerary."

"Peter, can't you see that I'm serious? I have decided to take matters in my own hands. The rest of the time you are here, you may come to see me twice a week. I shall instruct the concierge."

He turned and grasped the mantel shelf with both hands, and touched the log with the toe of his boot.

"What I told you about seeing Paris may be called polite fiction," he said. "I came over here to see you. I



HE TURNED SLOWLY AND LOOKED AT THE SHADOWS IN HER FACE have been afraid to say it until to-day, and I am afraid to say it now."

She sat very still. The log flared up again, and he turned slowly and looked at the shadows in her face.

"You — you have always been good to me," she answered. "I have never deserved it — I have never understood it. If it is any satisfaction for you to know that what I have saved of myself I owe to you, I tell you so freely."

"That," he said, "is something for which God forbid that I should take credit. What you are is due to the development of a germ within you, a development in which I have always had faith. I came here to see you, I came here because I love you, because I have always loved you, Honora."

"Oh, no, not that!" she cried; "not that!"

"Why not?" he asked. "It is something I cannot help, something beyond my power to prevent if I would. But I would not. I am proud of it, and I should be lost without it. I have had it always. I have come over to beg you to marry me."

"It's impossible! Can't you see it's impossible?"

"You don't love me?" he said. Into those few words was thrown all the suffering of his silent years.

"I don't know what I feel for you," she answered in an agonized voice, her fingers tightening over the backs of her white hands. "If reverence be love — if trust be love, infinite and absolute trust — if gratitude be love — if emptiness after you are gone be a sign of it — yes, I love you. If the power to see clearly only through you, to interpret myself only by your aid be love, I acknowledge it. I tell you so freely, as of your right to know. And the germ of which you spoke is you. You have grown until you have taken possession of — of what is left of me. If I had only been able to see clearly from the first, Peter, I should be another woman to-day, a whole woman, a wise woman. Oh, I have thought of it much. The secret of life was there at my side from the time I was able to pronounce your name, and I couldn't see it. You had it. You stayed. You took duty where you found it, and it has made you great. Oh, I don't mean to speak in a worldly sense. When I say that, it is to express the highest human quality of which I can think and feel. But I can't marry you. You must see it."

"I cannot see it," he replied, when he had somewhat gained control of himself.

"Because I should be wronging you."

"How?" he asked.

"In the first place, I should be ruining your career."

"If I had a career," he said, smiling gently, "you couldn't ruin it. You both overestimate and underestimate the world's opinion, Honora. As my wife, it will not treat you cruelly. And as for my career, as you call it, it has merely consisted in doing as best I could the work that has come to me. I have tried to serve well those who have employed me, and if my services be of value to them, and to those who may need me in the future, they are not going to reject me. If I have any worth in the world, you will but add to it. Without you I am incomplete."

She looked up at him wonderingly.

"Yes, you are great," she said. "You pity me, you think of my loneliness."

"It is true I cannot bear to picture you here," he exclaimed. "The thought tortures me, but it is because I love you, because I wish to take and shield you. I am not a man to marry a woman without love. It seems to me that you should know me well enough to believe that, Honora. There never has been any other woman in my life, and there never can be. I have given you proof of it, God knows."

"I am not what I was," she said, "I am not what I was. I have been dragged down."

He bent and lifted her hand from her knee, and raised it to his lips, a homage from him that gave her an exquisite pain.

"If you had been dragged down," he answered simply, "my love would have been killed. I know something of the horrors you have been through, as though I had suffered them myself. They might have dragged down another woman, Honora. But they have strangely ennobled you."

She drew her hand away.

"No," she said, "I do not deserve happiness. It cannot be my destiny."

"Destiny," he repeated. "Destiny is a thing not understandable by finite minds. It is not necessarily continued tragedy and waste, of that I am certain. Only a little thought is required, it seems to me, to assure us that we cannot be the judges of our own punishment on this earth. And of another world we know nothing. It cannot be any one's destiny to throw away a life while still something may be made of it. You would be throwing your life away here. That no other woman is possible, or ever can be possible, for me should be a consideration with you, Honora. What I ask of you is a sacrifice — will you make me happy?"

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Peter, do you care so much as that? If — if I could be sure that I were doing it for you! If in spite of — of all that has happened to me, I could be doing something for you — !"

He stooped and kissed her.

"You can if you will," he said.

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GROSSET & DUNLAP'S
Great Books at Little Prices

HAPPY HAWKINS. By Robert Alexander Wason. Illustrated by Howard Giles.

A ranch and cowboy novel. Happy Hawkins tells his own story with such a fine capacity for knowing how to do it and with so much humor that the reader's interest is held in surprise, then admiration and at last in positive affection.

COMRADES. By Thomas Dixon, Jr. Illustrated by C. D. Williams.

The locale of this story is in California, where a few socialists establish a little community.

The author leads the little band along the path of disillusionment, and gives some brilliant flashes of light on one side of an important question.

TONO-BUNGAY. By Herbert George Wells.

The hero of this novel is a young man who, through hard work, earns a scholarship and goes to London.

Written with a frankness verging on Rousseau's, Mr. Wells still uses rare discrimination and the border line of propriety is never crossed. An entertaining book with both a story and a moral, and without a dull page—Mr. Wells's most notable achievement.

A HUSBAND BY PROXY. By Jack Steele.

A young criminologist, but recently arrived in New York city, is drawn into a mystery, partly through financial need and partly through his interest in a beautiful woman, who seems at times the simplest child and again a perfect mistress of intrigue. A baffling detective story.

LIKE ANOTHER HELEN. By George Horton. Illustrated by C. M. Relyea.

Mr. Horton's powerful romance stands in a new field and brings an almost unknown world in reality before the reader—the world of conflict between Greek and Turk on the Island of Crete. The "Helen" of the story is a Greek, beautiful, desolate, defiant—pure as snow.

There is a certain new force about the story, a kind of master-craftsmanship and mental dominance that holds the reader.

THE MASTER OF APPLEBY. By Francis Lynde. Illustrated by T. de Thulstrup.

"A novel tale concerning itself in part with the great struggle in the two Carolinas, but chiefly with the adventures therein of two gentlemen who loved one and the same lady.

A strong, masculine and persuasive story.

A MODERN MADCNNA. By Caroline Abbot Stanley.

A story of American life, founded on facts as they existed some years ago in the District of Columbia. The theme is the maternal love and splendid courage of a woman.

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WHEN A MAN MARRIES. By Mary Roberts Rinehart. Illustrated by Harrison Fisher and Mayo Bunker.

A young artist, whose wife had recently divorced him, finds that a visit is due from his Aunt Selina, an elderly lady having ideas about things quite apart from the Bohemian set in which her nephew is a shining light. The way in which matters are temporarily adjusted forms the motif of the story.

A farcical extravaganza, dramatized under the title of "Seven Days"

THE FASHIONABLE ADVENTURES OF JOSHUA CRAIG. By David Graham Phillips. Illustrated.

A young westerner, uncouth and unconventional, appears in political and social life in Washington. He attains power in politics, and a young woman of the exclusive set becomes his wife, undertaking his education in social amenities.

"DOC." GORDON. By Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman. Illustrated by Frank T. Merrill.

Against the familiar background of American town life, the author portrays a group of people strangely involved in a mystery. "Doc." Gordon, the one physician of the place, Dr. Elliot, his assistant, a beautiful woman and her altogether charming daughter are all involved in the plot. A novel of great interest.

HOLY ORDERS. By Marie Corelli.

A dramatic story, in which is pictured a clergyman in touch with society people, stage favorites, simple village folk, powerful financiers and others, each presenting vital problems to this man "in holy orders"—problems that we are now struggling with in America.

KATRINE. By Elinor Macartney Lane. With frontispiece.

Katrine, the heroine of this story, is a lovely Irish girl, of lowly birth, but gifted with a beautiful voice.

The narrative is based on the facts of an actual singer's career, and the viewpoint throughout is a most exalted one.

THE FORTUNES OF FIFI. By Molly Elliot Seawell. Illustrated by T. de Thulstrup.

A story of life in France at the time of the first Napoleon. Fifi, a glad, mad little actress of eighteen, is the star performer in a third rate Parisian theatre. A story as dainty as a Watteau painting.

SHE THAT HESITATES. By Harris Dickson. Illustrated by C. W. Relyea.

The scene of this dashing romance shifts from Dresden to St. Petersburg in the reign of Peter the Great, and then to New Orleans.

The hero is a French Soldier of Fortune, and the princess, who hesitates—but you must read the story to know how she that hesitates may be lost and yet saved.

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TITLES SELECTED FROM

GROSSET & DUNLAP'S LIST

REALISTIC, ENGAGING PICTURES OF LIFE

THE GARDEN OF FATE. By Roy Norton. Illustrated by Joseph Clement Coll.

The colorful romance of an American girl in Morocco, and of a beautiful garden, whose beauty and traditions of strange subtle happenings were closed to the world by a Sultan's seal.

THE MAN HIGHER UP. By Henry Russell Miller. Full page vignette illustrations by M. Leone Bracker.

The story of a tenement waif who rose by his own ingenuity to the office of mayor of his native city. His experiences while "climbing," make a most interesting example of the possibilities of human nature to rise above circumstances.

THE KEY TO YESTERDAY. By Charles Neville Buck. Illustrated by R. Schabelitz.

Robert Saxon, a prominent artist, has an accident, while in Paris, which obliterates his memory, and the only clue he has to his former life is a rusty key. What door in Paris will it unlock? He must know that before he woos the girl he loves.

THE DANGER TRAIL. By James Oliver Curwood. Illustrated by Charles Livingston Bull.

The danger trail is over the snow-smothered North. A young Chicago engineer, who is building a road through the Hudson Bay region, is involved in mystery, and is led into ambush by a young woman.

THE GAY LORD WARING. By Houghton Townley. Illustrated by Will Grefe.

A story of the smart hunting set in England. A gay young lord wins in love against his selfish and cowardly brother and apparently against fate itself.

BY INHERITANCE. By Octave Thanet. Illustrated by Thomas Fogarty. Elaborate wrapper in colors.

A wealthy New England spinster with the most elaborate plans for the education of the negro goes to visit her nephew in Arkansas, where she learns the needs of the colored race first hand and begins to lose her theories.

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THE MUSIC MASTER. By Charles Klein. Illustrated by John Rae.

This marvelously vivid narrative turns upon the search of a German musician in New York for his little daughter. Mr. Klein has well portrayed his pathetic struggle with poverty, his varied experiences in endeavoring to meet the demands of a public not trained to an appreciation of the classic, and his final great hour when, in the rapidly shifting events of a big city, his little daughter, now a beautiful young woman, is brought to his very door. A superb bit of fiction, palpitating with the life of the great metropolis. The play in which David Warfield scored his highest success.

DR. LAVENDAR'S PEOPLE. By Margaret Deland. Illustrated by Lucius Hitchcock.

Mrs. Deland won so many friends through Old Chester Tales that this volume needs no introduction beyond its title. The lovable doctor is more ripened in this later book, and the simple comedies and tragedies of the old village are told with dramatic charm.

OLD CHESTER TALES. By Margaret Deland. Illustrated by Howard Pyle.

Stories portraying with delightful humor and pathos a quaint people in a sleepy old town. Dr. Lavendar, a very human and lovable "preacher," is the connecting link between these dramatic stories from life.

HE FELL IN LOVE WITH HIS WIFE. By E. P. Roe. With frontispiece.

The hero is a farmer—a man with honest, sincere views of life. Bereft of his wife, his home is cared for by a succession of domestics of varying degrees of inefficiency until, from a most unpromising source, comes a young woman who not only becomes his wife but commands his respect and eventually wins his love. A bright and delicate romance, revealing on both sides a love that surmounts all difficulties and survives the censure of friends as well as the bitterness of enemies.

THE YOKE. By Elizabeth Miller.

Against the historical background of the days when the children of Israel were delivered from the bondage of Egypt, the author has sketched a romance of compelling charm. A biblical novel as great as any since "Ben Hur."

SAUL OF TARSUS. By Elizabeth Miller. Illustrated by André Castaigne.

The scenes of this story are laid in Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome and Damascus. The Apostle Paul, the Martyr Stephen, Herod Agrippa and the Emperors Tiberius and Caligula are among the mighty figures that move through the pages. Wonderful descriptions, and a love story of the purest and noblest type mark this most remarkable religious romance.

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THE NOVELS OF

IRVING BACHELLER

Full of the real atmosphere of American home life.

THE HAND-MADE GENTLEMAN. With a double-page frontispiece.

The son of a wash-woman begins re-making himself socially and imparts his system to his numerous friends. A story of rural New York with an appreciation of American types only possible from the pen of a humor loving American.

DARREL OF THE BLESSED ISLES. With illustrations by Arthur I. Keller.

A tale of the North Country. In Darrel, the clock tinker, wit, philosopher and man of mystery, is portrayed a force held in fetters and covered with obscurity, yet strong to make its way, and widely felt.

D'RI AND I: A Tale of Daring Deeds in the Second War with the British. Illustrated by F. C. Yohn.

"D'ri" was a mighty hunter, quaint, rugged, wise, truthful. He fights magnificently on the Lawrence, and is a striking figure in this enthusiastic romance of early America.

EBEN HOLDEN: A Tale of the North Country.

A story of the hardy wood-choppers of Vermont, who founded their homes in the Adirondack wilderness. "Eben," the hero, is a bachelor with an imagination that is a very wilderness of oddities.

SILAS STRONG: Emperor of the Woods.

A simple account of one summer life, as it was lived in a part of the Adirondacks. Silas Strong is a woodland philosopher, and his camp is the scene of an impressive little love story.

VERGILIUS: A Tale of the Coming of Christ.

A thrilling and beautiful story of two young Roman Patricians whose great and perilous love in the reign of Augustus leads them through the momentous, exciting events that marked the year just preceding the birth of Christ.

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KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN'S STORIES OF PURE DELIGHT

Full of originality and humor, kindliness and cheer

THE OLD PEABODY PEW. Large Octavo. Decorative text pages, printed in two colors. Illustrations by Alice Barber Stephens.

One of the prettiest romances that has ever come from this author's pen is made to bloom on Christmas Eve in the sweet freshness of an old New England meeting house.

PENELOPE'S PROGRESS. Attractive cover design in colors.

Scotland is the background for the merry doings of three very clever and original American girls. Their adventures in adjusting themselves to the Scot and his land are full of humor.

PENELOPE'S IRISH EXPERIENCES. Uniform in style with "Penelope's Progress."

The trio of clever girls who rambled over Scotland cross the border to the Emerald Isle, and again they sharpen their wits against new conditions, and revel in the land of laughter and wit.

REBECCA OF SUNNYBROOK FARM.

One of the most beautiful studies of childhood—Rebecca's artistic, unusual and quaintly charming qualities stand cut midst a circle of austere New Englanders. The stage version is making a phenomenal dramatic record.

NEW CHRONICLES OF REBECCA. With illustrations by F. C. Yohn.

Some more quaintly amusing chronicles that carry Rebecca through various stages to her eighteenth birthday.

ROSE O' THE RIVER. With illustrations by George Wright.

The simple story of Rose, a country girl and Stephen a sturdy young farmer, The girl's fancy for a city man interrupts their love and merges the story into an emotional strain where the reader follows the events with rapt attention.

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